UNIVERSITY
OF TASMANIA

Lost or Gone

Nature's Remnants: Mysteries and threats of human and native species interactions, past and present

by
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Signed statement of originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

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Abstract

This exegesis explores, through an art practice, the environmental issues of species decline and loss. It asks the question 'what can artists do to elevate public awareness of destructive environmental practices that are upsetting the ecological balance?'

References are made to historical searches for species on the brink of extinction, and present day fears of further decline in environmental diversity are examined. The design and construction of movement sensing cameras and the results of using unusual methods of detecting species type and abundance at several study sites will be presented in the final exhibition, alongside conventional drawings, paintings and sculptures, demonstrating that the potential for works generated directly from the natural environment and its creatures can be a genuine art form.

The current practice of clear felling native forest has fragmented and isolated remnant forests, leading to an actual or perceived decline in resident native animals and birds. In Tasmania, some species of birds have been lost forever, while the marsupial wolf or thylacine maintains a slender chance for discovery and possibly, recovery. I have developed and employed specific equipment in an attempt to establish what animals are active in a land area at Golden Valley on the slopes of the Western Tiers in Tasmania. This site has been the base for explorations into the surrounding bush land, where three other specific sites with different landforms have been chosen for more detailed study of the area's flora and fauna.

On my own property in the area, the construction of extended wetland earthworks has given me the opportunity to study the effects of human intervention in the landscape and how this has affected the local resident creatures. These animals and birds have been drawn into a creative process to produce art works that are an assimilation of their input and my own.

Acknowledgements

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Prologue

This thesis is a story. It contains scientific information, but it is not really science; it is a story, but I cannot claim that it is literature either, and it contains examples of art, but this art was also not completely made by me. It is a document about uncertainty, about a search and research and yet in all these matters I cannot give with certainty any definitive answers. Nevertheless I hope that this document and the accompanying artworks do stimulate the reader and viewer to contemplate a little more deeply their own ideas and feelings regarding the information and artworks supplied.

Although the data herewith regarding the stated aims of this thesis, as articulated in the Introduction to follow the Prologue, covers the three year time frame of this research document, the reason that the subject matter was initially chosen goes back many years, and will continue well after this thesis is presented. In stating this fact I am also indicating that this research is important to me as it is part of what I do and who I am.

From an early age the natural world has been an important part of my life, and I have endeavored to live in isolated areas as much as possible, and this has allowed me to observe nature firsthand, and from an artistic point of view to use this material as the basis for my artwork. This has included expressing concepts regarding the unity of art, life and nature, and at times I have chosen to include native creatures as direct participants in the making of these artworks, such as rats, cockroaches, flies, slugs and mosquitoes to name a few, so it may not come as a surprise to find that this research also contains artworks where I have collaborated with native species, both lowly and of a higher order of intelligence (as generally accepted by the scientific community and the general public). This unity of purpose with other species is more than a mere gimmick to produce *new art*, because it goes to a fundamental principle that I aspire to, and this is, *wherever possible human beings should allow other species the maximum freedom, space and peace, to live their lives.*

At age about 14, after a close encounter with mortality, I painted a picture that I called *Life* (1957), that is still in my possession, and retains both the freshness of its colors, and the memory of the ideas expressed in the painting.

Fig.1 J.S. Parish, *Life* (1957), water-colour on brown paper, 25 x 55cm.

Life, represented by a small twisted branch, clings precariously to the sides of an abyss, which on close inspection shows that even this seemingly solid wall is nothing more than an illusion. Overhead, nature, represented by a hunchbacked Eagle-Crow, guards any escape up and out into the light. The only escape is through, into the Yves Klein blue, and into the void (at that time I knew nothing of Klein or any other artists). I use this example to demonstrate that I have always used art to express my emotions about my direct experiences of the world, and in most cases this has been in what I would call the natural world, or simply *nature.*

The search to which I previously referred has to a large part been the collection of stories, correspondence, and printed articles about unusual or strange creatures that have from time to time either being seen, heard or killed, on mainland Australia and to a lesser extent in Tasmania (other than the supposedly extinct thylacine). Also, over a period of a

couple of years I travelled the outback where I was able to talk directly with people who had experiences with unusual creatures, and in fact in one instance I was fortunate enough to witness one myself.

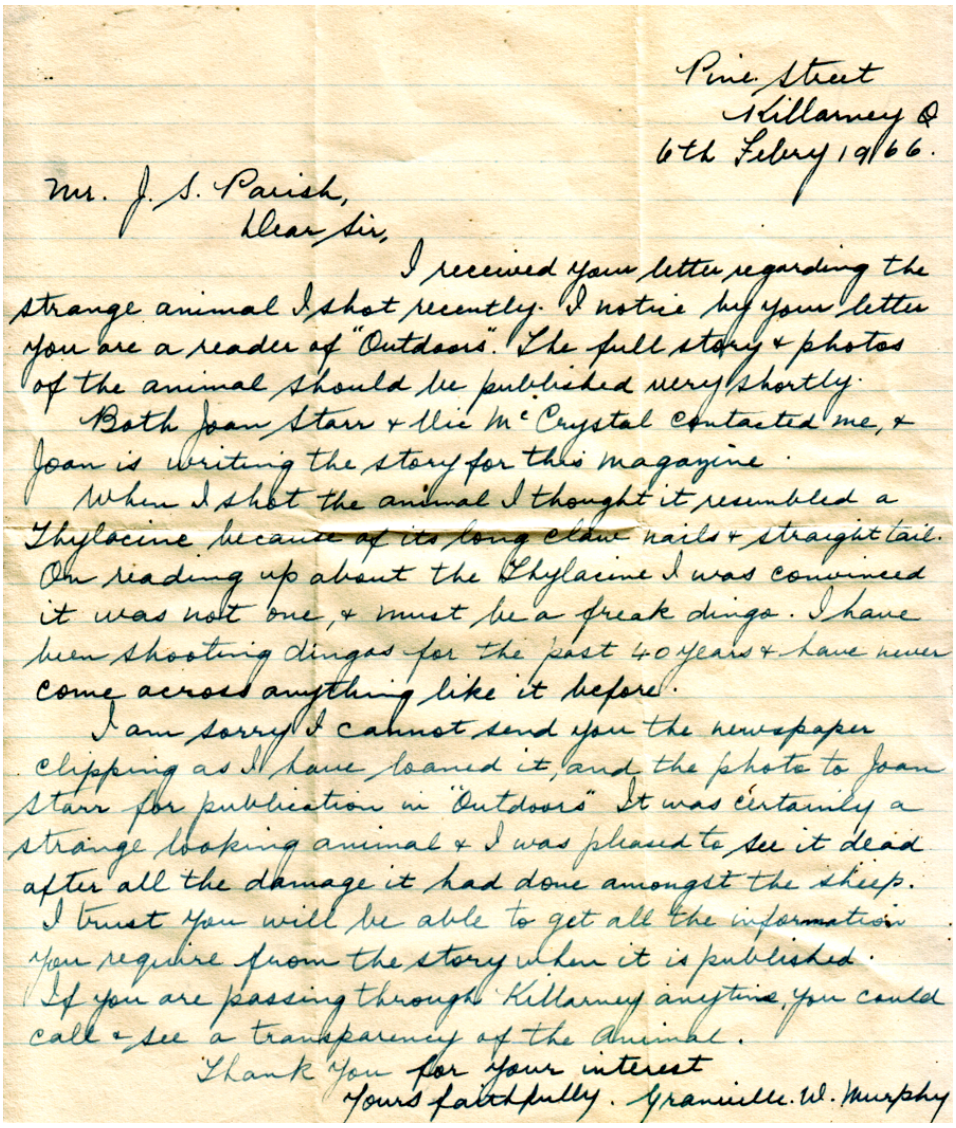
As I have myself observed a large black animal (at least three times the size of a domestic cat) cross the road in northern New South Wales in a heavily wooded area, at about 2am in the morning, I can personally confirm that these animals do exist. The animal crossed quickly from one side of the road to the other, only yards in front of the car that I was driving. It only touched both sides of the road in one long bound, from my right to my left. Although this was a very brief sighting I still see it clearly in my head. The incident was unexpected but was of the kind that comes as a confirmative revelation to one who has been interested in such phenomena for many years.

An article in the *Herald Sun* newspaper 19 Sept 2008 by Nick Ralston and Evyn Testoni titled 'NSW Premier Nathan Rees believes panther roaming Sydney suburbs', states that the new Premier of New South Wales, Nathan Rees, intended to have investigated sightings of a large cat on the outskirts of Sydney, adding weight to the veracity of reported sightings in recent years of large black cats around the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney.

For many years there have been stories and sightings in the area of Emmaville, a small town located in the northern New South Wales tablelands. The 'Emmaville Panther' is famous, and in fact a local pub was renamed for it, (I have stayed there although it is not nearly as *full on* in its promotion of an animal as the Tiger Bar in Mole Creek Hotel, Tasmania). The area though, is extremely rugged and a valley in the general area, named 'Bolivia', is extremely wild, and invites speculation as to what may live there.

Just over the border into Queensland, a gentleman named Granville Murphy actually shot an animal that was unidentified at the time. It was hermaphroditic, hairless, had enormous curved claws, a short head and was, before being shot, seen to hop. It must have been killing sheep in the area as apparently after its death the killings stopped.

In early 1966, I was living in Sydney preparing my Land Rover for my 'strange animal' research expedition. I heard a report on the radio of Mr. Murphy's animal and I decided to contact the gentleman by letter. He responded promptly and in his reply (shown below), he mentions the thylacine and *Outdoors* magazine. His response was in regard to my reference to an article in the magazine (Feb.1965) by Bill James, 'The Strange Affair at Staggy Creek'. This article describes a striped animal killed in the New England Ranges of northern New South Wales, an area about 200 kilometres south of the Killarney district where Mr. Murphy shot his animal. I later found an article in *People* magazine (15 June 1966) by Vic McCrystal, and another in *Outdoors* (June 1966) by Joan Starr, both describing and showing details of the unidentified creature.



Pine Street
Killarney Q
6th Febry 1966.

Mr. J. S. Parish,
Dear Sir,

I received your letter regarding the strange animal I shot recently. I notice by your letter you are a reader of "Outdoors". The full story & photos of the animal should be published very shortly.

Both Joan Starr & Vic Mc Crystal contacted me, & Joan is writing the story for this magazine.

When I shot the animal I thought it resembled a Thylacine because of its long claw nails & straight tail. On reading up about the Thylacine I was convinced it was not one, & must be a freak dingo. I have been shooting dingos for the past 40 years & have never come across anything like it before.

I am sorry I cannot send you the newspaper clipping as I have loaned it, and the photo to Joan Starr for publication in "Outdoors" It was certainly a strange looking animal & I was pleased to see it dead after all the damage it had done amongst the sheep.

I trust you will be able to get all the information you require from the story when it is published.

If you are passing through Killarney anytime, you could call & see a transparency of the Animal.

Thank You for your interest

Yours faithfully. Granville. W. Murphy

Fig.2 Mr. Murphy's reply to my request for information, 1966.

These few examples that I have given, (I have many more on file), come from personal experience and correspondence, but they do demonstrate in the context of this thesis, that no matter how isolated these events were, they do from time to time occur. I will now though, move on, so as to maintain the flow, to the next phase in this story which was another unusual event that in fact is the driving force behind my decision to undertake this research.

The visitor

The following, written a short time after the incident, was taken from my diary entries (July 2000).

Our family lived in a little house high on the side of a mountain on the slopes of the Western Tiers of Tasmania. We kept a few geese which were locked up at night in a coop made from an old water tank. This was about 100 metres from the house, towards the forest, above a steep fern gully. There were only a few scattered dwellings along a road on the other side of the valley and none ran domestic stock, the paddocks were being overrun with wallabies and rabbits. Further down towards the south, the forest was a mixture of gum trees on the ridges and myrtle stands filled the gullies with another small patch of myrtles between Quamby Bluff and the house. The area abounds with sandstone cliffs and ledges, beneath which are countless caves. The geese would make a lot of noise at times which rang through the mountains.

About December 1999, we had erected a tent a few metres from the myrtle forest towards the mountain, up the slope from the tank and above the fern gully. Sometimes we used to sleep in the tent as it seemed even more quiet and peaceful up there despite the isolation of the house. We were about to go to sleep one night when we heard a strange 'Yip Yip' noise coming from well down the gully. At first I thought it may have been a bird that I had not heard before, but I doubted that as I had lived in the bush for a long time and took notice of these things. The night was so still and clear that the sound could have been coming from some way off, but the lay of the land precluded it being more than half way down the fern gully. The sound moved closer at intervals of long enough for the creature to be on foot. I remember at least four calls before the last call that was above the level of the tent and not more than 50m away. My partner said she thought that there was more than one. She had heard the noise on another occasion when I was not there.

While sleeping in the tent on another night, shortly after the sounds had first been heard, something was attempting to get into the old water tank coop and was banging on the corrugated sides. The geese made agitated sounds that disturbed our dog which left the tent to bark at the intruder which moved on that night.

One night our little boy failed to lock the door properly as the catch was difficult, and the geese were attacked. Two were bitten in the head and neck, one was dead and the other had to be destroyed. I had seen some tiger cats in the area, one quite large, and I had observed a huge one twice in my life. One, I had snared as a youth of fifteen when snaring wallabies for food, and the other at dusk as it jumped through a fence. If it had not been for the spots I would have thought that it was a tiger as its tail was long and straight.

One afternoon soon after the attack I was walking at the back of the tank towards an old abandoned shed when I caught a glimpse of a sandy coloured animal in

bracken ferns near the tank, towards the fern gully. It moved quickly and I could not see what is was, but I thought at the time that it was too light to be a wallaby and I did not hear the usual thump that a wallaby makes when disturbed.

Towards the end of April 2000 the days were still warm. On three successive days, one goose at a time, disappeared. In about a week I discovered the remains of one of them in bush land about 200 metres from the house across and near the main highway. This puzzled me as I knew that the geese had crossed the road at least once, but had not noticed that at that time. The only remains were a neat pile of feathers, a piece of wing tip with feathers bitten off cleanly, and a piece of pelvic bone. The lower gut was in a pile a few feet away. No other parts of the bird were to be seen, but there was a fresh dropping among the remains. It was obvious that an animal had eaten it but it seemed very neat in its execution. The fact that on three successive days the geese had been taken was strange in itself, hinting at an animal which planned and operated in the daytime. I had been told of two sightings of light coloured dog-like animals which had been seen within a kilometer from this site in the daytime and I thought that was significant.

As the catch on the tank was now even harder to close, once again the door was accidentally left ajar and the geese were attacked again, which would suggest that the coop was constantly checked as the only two times that it was left open attacks occurred. One bird was mauled about the head and later died, one was attacked but survived and another was taken away. It was a heavy bird and yet there were no signs of dragging, blood or feather about, it had apparently been carried off by a large strong animal.

Immediately after this event, three nights in a row I heard from bed in the house about 10-11 pm, once on the first night, twice on the second and once on the third, a sound like I had not heard before. It was a blood chilling sound that was a cross between a cough and the sound a big cat, like a puma, makes. I had the impression at the time that it was a scream of frustration.

I decided to attempt to find out what it was. I coated several small white melamine boards with soot from burning a kerosene soaked rag tied to a stick with wire. I placed these side by side at the side of the tank which was clear and where I thought that an animal would come if arriving from the forest or gully, and would be the easiest access to the door. It did not come this way, but the next night I did get some prints when I transferred the board to the other side, even though it was sloping and narrow and difficult to navigate under some sheets of iron that I had put above the boards. It looked like drizzle which came in the night had caused the animal to slip and its claws came out for grip on this particular board, although I did not record these prints. I also collected some fresh dropping in the vicinity of the tank.

The next day I think it was raining but the next night I put four boards in front of the door with a white plastic shower curtain underneath protruding beyond the boards. This time I got tracks of at least three animals: a mouse; what I think is a devil with a distinctive pattern; and a larger animal that is clearly a dasyurid (one of the three: a quoll, Tasmanian devil and the thylacine). The animal picked up the soot from the board, leaving white foot prints, then left black prints on the white sheet as it moved away.

At first I thought that the animal came in the same difficult way as previously but on closer inspection of the photographs later I am now not so sure. It turned towards the door, stopped and looks like it lifted its front paw or paws as there are three similar front prints close to each other as if the foot was lifted, put down and again lifted, then put down again. It then turned and walked in a semi circular anti-clockwise direction and off the sheet.

I then put down a large sheet of soft clay to try to acquire a three-dimensional print. The animal put a foot on the very edge of the clay but would proceed no further. After this the frosts came, freezing the clay, but it did either not come or chose to stay off the clay; if it came early in the night then the clay would still have been soft.

On the last day of contact I went to let out the geese in the morning when I saw a set of tracks in the frost. They were coming towards the house on a wide track that passed the tank. The spacing and pattern of the tracks suggested that it was the same large animal. I estimated that it was about 300mm between each print and about 200mm across between each side of the animal. It had obviously come in the early evening after the frost had started to form, as the prints were frosted also. These prints showed an even stride of continuous movement. I estimated that it was about 700mm between successive single foot prints when you added the length of the pad to the distance between them. I ran back to the house for my camera and a tape measure but by the time I returned the sun had risen and I could no longer see the prints as it now appeared all dazzling white.

Since this event, time and life have intervened to the extent that I was unable to pursue, on the ground, investigation of the possibility of the thylacine surviving in my area, but on being offered an opportunity to conduct a research project, including a thesis, I decided to pursue this matter again. My story about the visitor can be seen in the context of this thesis as a motivation for my research and, by being a witness to the events, both actual and circumstantial as evidence of the continuing existence of the thylacine, that has not been effectively dismissed.

Introduction

Nature's remnants, lost or gone, mysteries and threats of human and native species interactions, past and present

Lost or gone? It is true, that in the past, much of the natural environment and the species that live within it, have gone forever, either by natural forces or by mankind's intervention. Unfortunately today there is little that we humans can do about what has gone before, other than to take heed, and try not to repeat mistakes of the past. Subsequently I will not spend a lot of time in this thesis dealing with what is gone, other than to discuss some aspects that relate directly to my own research, but I will be discussing in detail what may have been lost, and the mysteries, or myths, that may have grown up around some native species where there is still a possibility, despite how slim or improbable this may be, that they may have survived. I will be relating my previous experiences in this area, and my detection methods, and how this has led directly to the research that is ongoing at this time.

When considering how humankind has acted and continues to act, in such an inconsiderate and damaging manner to the natural environment and its creatures, while the general populace sees itself, not as another animal, but apart and above everything else in nature, I see that psychological damage is being done, particularly here in Tasmania, and elsewhere in the world. I will be outlining how I feel this is occurring and why, and I will be offering some alternative possibilities.

I will be referring to previous written works on how humankind has in fact evolved to its present state of development through interaction with other nonhuman species of animals, and although we may wish to deny this, it was and is, still necessary today for healthy and balanced lives. There are instances today where certain native creatures are singled out for special attention and possible protection, and it will be noted generally that the more closely these creatures resemble human beings the more likely that there will be positive moves in this direction. The traits that make these creatures more humanlike are their rates of intelligence (as measured against human ways of thinking), or the degree of sentience, that the creature shows. I will be demonstrating results of studies that I have conducted on degrees of sentience shown by several

creatures, on the lower and higher levels, as normally judged, and show how learning and adaption are still taking place.

My own property ‘Cloud 13’, where my foundry complex is being erected, is the main area where my studies take place, evaluating how interaction and adaptation can take place with wild creatures in a mutually beneficial relationship. Also, other nearby areas of both altered and remnants native forest, are being studied to evaluate whether some threatened species of animals are still surviving in these areas.

As far as my art is concerned, I will show how my own interaction with wild creatures can be used as both a stimulus and as a means of producing art that is an assimilation of their and my input, which cannot be distinguished in the final results, from what we normally consider to be acceptable art forms. In this context, and the fact that artists today present such diverse content in their works of art, such as a reproduction of a classical landscape, as recently won the Glover prize, to presentations using the latest in computer technology, to others that could be described as more than bordering on pornography, meaning that almost anything is now being accepted today as art. Erwin Panofsky noted in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (1955 p.37), ‘in defining a work of art as a “man made object demanding to be experienced aesthetically” we encounter for the first time a basic difference between the humanities and natural science’. This famous art-historian, whose books challenged the artistic status quo, thus proposes that art can only be made by humans, and that natural science cannot be art. In my work I will be challenging both notions and will be presenting my collaborative work with animals, and the cameras and other constructed items that I have built to assist in collection of my data, as sculptural items, as well as more conventional sculptures and drawings.

These constructed artifacts will be employed both to ascertain how the wild creatures in my study areas are faring, such as the Tasmanian devils, and to assist me in my attempts at collaborative art making with wild creatures.

Chapter 1

Recollections from past experiences and techniques developed for data collection, that influenced current research methods

The abiding interest that I have in nature's strange and unusual creatures had its genesis in several incidents that took place over a number of years, beginning in my teens. The first was an encounter with an unidentified animal in the sand dunes near our shack on the Bass Strait coast. The West Coast of Tasmania was the scene for the next event in the early 1960s. In this west coast event while going ashore at Sandy Cape from the fishing boat on which I was a deckhand, dog-like footprints, but showing unusual back foot depressions, were discovered on the beach apparently in pursuit of a wallaby. About this time it was reported that at this location a Tasmanian tiger was shot, but the carcass was never recovered. The prevalence of Tasmanian devils in this area at the time makes this inevitable if the body was not protected, as the report stated it was being merely covered by an old sheet of roofing iron. Tasmanian Devils devour all of a carcass, even the bones.

The next story became a stimulus for one of the first art works that I was to attempt when I began painting seriously.

While I was a resident miner at Lightning Ridge Opal fields in northwest New South Wales I came into conversation with a man named George Graham, at this time quite an elderly man. George and his brother Sid, both single men, lived in an old house in the village. They were quiet men and not seen to be other than honest non-flamboyant people. In other parts of Australia, for example in central Queensland and rural Tasmania, it has been my experience that it is not uncommon for locals to exaggerate stories, whether as a joke or personal delusion I cannot say.

He told me that he and his brother Sid were in Tasmania working on an alluvial osmoridium mine at Adams River (Adams Field), that was and still is, a remote area towards the southwest and until recently reached only with difficulty by crossing boggy areas by the use of 'Corduroy', (saplings laid horizontally on the ground across a soft patch). George described a cleared area with large tree stumps, dispersed among the

bracken ferns covering the ground that sloped down to a steep gully where a creek wandered among the miner's camps, erected on their prospects.

He described in detail the camp site and the old army fly tent where they were living. He said he arose in the night to relieve himself, pulling back the tent flap to find a bright clear moonlight night that was 'almost like daylight' (I remember these Tasmanian nights as a boy and this is accurate, as if looking at the world through a light blue filter). To his astonishment he was staring down at 'a tiger with its nose in a Jones (IXL) apricot jam tin'. After extracting its snout from the tin the animal loped off through the ferns towards the gulley. He could hear the dogs from the other miners camps begin to bark, as the animal traversed the ground to the creek and beyond. Soon all the dogs were baying into the still cool night air.

It became apparent to me that I had just witnessed an old simple man with an acutely sharp memory reliving his personal encounters with Tasmanian tigers, first hand. A quick calculation of estimated dates put this sighting about 1936, or slightly before, depending on George's age at the time of his telling me (my estimation about 60) in 1966 and him mining at age 30, but he may have been younger at the time. This would put George having seen both a live and dead thylacine in the wild at about the same time that the last captive animal had died in Hobart, supposedly making the species extinct. George also described in detail having found the rear end remains of a young thylacine still suspended from a springer snare and that had subsequently been eaten by devils. He was particularly incensed that those responsible for checking their snares had apparently not done so for some time, meaning that the young tiger was probably eaten alive.

The accuracy of his descriptions of places and events made me believe I could judge the truth of his statements, as my time in the Australian outback had shown me that people seemed to delight in trying to pulling a Tasmanian's leg.

Robert Paddle describes in *The Last Tasmanian Tiger*, *the history and extinction of the thylacine* (2000, p.95) several reports over many years regarding thylacines taking scraps from around both Aboriginal and European campsites. He also includes mention of a liking for poultry and one report of geese being taken (p.97). This is supportive of the theory that the animal previously mentioned in this document as attacking our geese may have been a tiger.

Having found myself in a relatively isolated place in an area previously well known for being inhabited by thylacines, hearing a mysterious large creature making sounds that I had not heard before, it obviously being the one that was attacking our geese, as evidenced by the size and shape of the footprints collected from my soot covered boards, I began to wonder if perhaps Heisenberg's uncertainty principle as articulated in his publication *The Physical Principles of the Quantum Theory* (1930), might not be coming into play. This principle postulates that if you look at or think about something, (in other words you become the *Observer*), the parameters in which the object of your attention operates, is altered. In this case my strong conviction that the tiger may not be extinct, may in some strange unknowable way, make it so. Uncertainty remains a decisive element of this research still. Sasha Grishin (1998), commenting on John Wolseley's attitude towards the environment states that

> if the notion of a dichotomy between humankind and nature is rejected, then the artist is no longer a casual observer, but an active participant in the wilderness and its processes… if… Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, govern both human consciousness and all physical matter, then an active collaboration with nature becomes less of a partnership and more of a single, continuous process' (p.116).

At the time, family and work pressures meant that I could not devise a sophisticated method of establishing what this creature was, for instance using cameras and sound recorders, so I did it the best way I could. This method was to use soot covered boards to at least recover footprints. This method did in fact work very well and in my current research I have modified this approach to be more adaptable for the difficult locations chosen to study.

I informed the head of the Tasmanian Parks and Wild Life Service, Nick Mooney, of my results, and also presented photographs of the prints to the Queen Victoria Launceston Museum and Art Gallery (QVMAG) for comparison with devil and quoll prints. The specimens shown to me did not seem to conform to my prints, but I was offered no explanation as to what the creature that made my prints could be.

A scat recovered from the location where one of our geese was killed was stored and later reintroduced for this research project; I will comment more on this later in the exegesis (Chapter 4).

Chapter 2

Research throwing doubt on thylacine extinction

Although it is generally accepted in the community and by the government that the species *Thylacinus cynocephalus* expired in 1936, over the intervening period between then and today there have been so many sightings which suggest otherwise, that the animal has taken on the status of a myth by most. Despite no positive official identification of a live or dead individual, there is still so much uncertainty surrounding this creature that some people, such as myself, still assert that there is a chance, albeit a slim one, that it has survived. There is some evidence to support this view, a little of which I will be presenting in Chapter 4.

In October of 1989, a seminar titled 'Threatened Species and Habitats in Tasmania', was conducted at the Centre for Environmental Studies, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Tasmania. It generated a report edited by Rod Fensham. When referring to the Tasmanian tiger and the Tasmanian devil Steven Smith from the Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage stated that both were 'once widespread on mainland Australia, but both species were confined to this island long before European settlement began' (1989 p.11). This statement is not strictly true as Tasmanian devils have been found in Victoria, but of course some would also say, as in the case of the fox in Tasmania, that someone had taken them there.

The most telling quote from Fensham's document is a statement that 'only two Tasmanian vertebrates, the King Island emu and Tasmanian emu, are known to have become extinct since European settlement began. The thylacine was pushed to the brink of extinction at the turn of the century, and *may also be extinct*' (my italics) (1989, p.12).

Robert Paddle, in his definitive work *The History and Extinction of the Thylacine* (2002) states 'records of the Tasmanian devil on the mainland in Victoria date back to the colony's first establishment, and the five museum specimen localities match the distributions suggested from 19th century observations' (p.25). If after all this time devils are still turning up on the mainland, how more likely that the thylacine still remains in

Tasmania? Reference is made in this book to the Golden Valley region, which is where I live and am conducting my research: ‘A Mr.Youd, of the well known wood chopping family, who lived there and also trapped thylacine’ (p.38).

In another local reference, T.R. Skemp in his book *The Geology and Natural History of the Deloraine Municipality* (1964) proceeds to describe the Forester kangaroo as still living in the area, ‘though the thylacine is extremely rare’ (p.45). At a local level at least this statement suggests that to him there was more than a little doubt that this creature was actually extinct. Excessive clearing of forests in the municipality since this book was written has made this less possible near the Deloraine Township, but there are still areas around my property that have not been decimated, even though logging companies continue to push ever deeper into these remnant forests.

I will not document here the many more local stories surrounding the thylacine and its possible survival, because although being the stimulus for this research it is only a part, there being other native species in my area of study that are becoming remnants and whose futures are uncertain. The Tasmanian devil is in deep trouble and the spotted tailed quoll is seen less often than it was in the not too distant past.

Before proceeding to present my own evidence assembled in the course of this research project, I will refer to examples from the last 45 years from news sources that demonstrate that worldwide, at times so-called extinct creatures do ‘come back from the dead’.

Wallaby back from the dead

TELEGRAM JUNE 19 1966

THEY THOUGHT IT WAS EXTINCT

A wallaby thought to be extinct in New South Wales has been found in rocky hill country north of Broken Hill.

Scientists have identified the animal, the yellow-footed wallaby, by its footprints.

Only three men, a station manager and two employees, are known to have seen the wallaby. Men rarely go into the country the wallaby inhabits.

Footprints indicate there may be about 12 yellow-footed wallabies in the area.

The Fauna Protection Panel and the CSIRO are keeping the exact

THE yellow-footed wallaby . . . sighted near Broken Hill.

Fig.3 Article in *The Telegraph*, 19 June 1966

An example from *The Telegraph,* of the above from 19 June 1966 (Fig.3), a time when I was living in outback New South Wales, was encouraging but in truth there are far more species becoming extinct today than those few who beat the odds. Even then the authorities were guarded as to the exact location of the animals that had been rediscovered in the mainland outback.

In completing his comprehensive investigation of the Tasmanian tiger for the *Australian Geographic* magazine, Andy Park (1986), shows a map of Tasmania pinpointing a total of 360 sightings, and lists eight official and private searches which have been unable to produce positive evidence. (Fig.4)

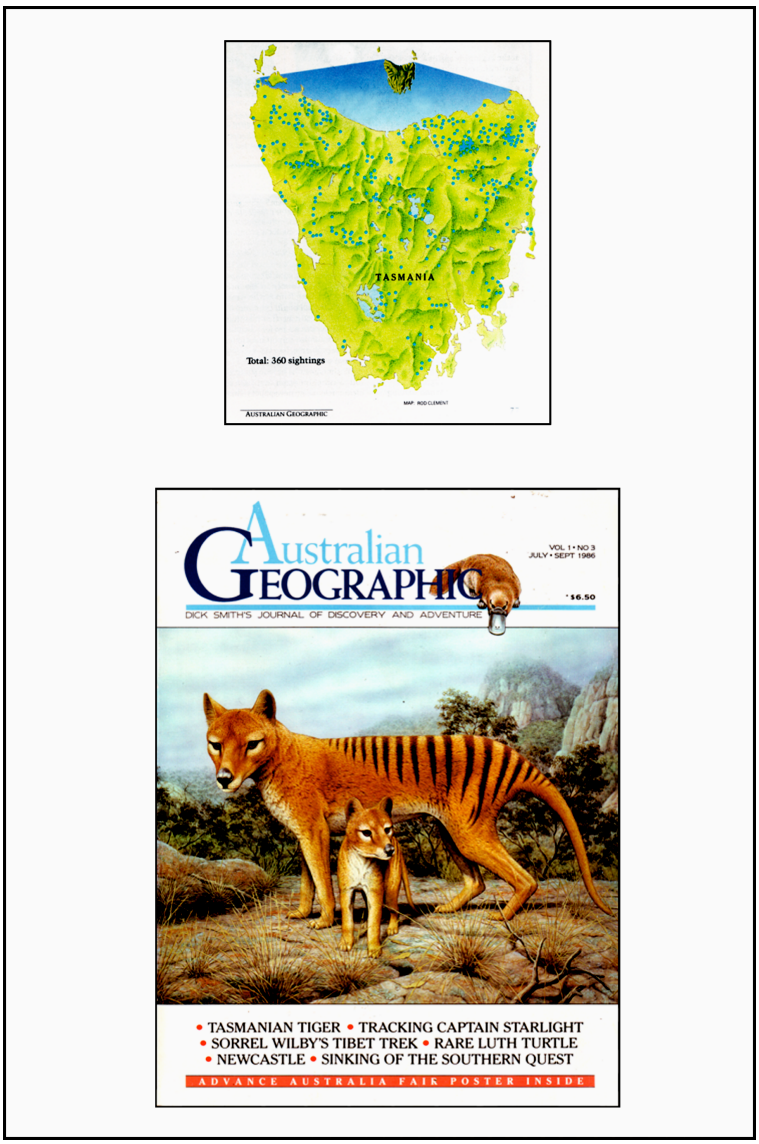


Fig.4 Extracts from article by Andy Park in *Australian Geographic Magazine*, July- Sept 1986.

The article concludes with the statement that while the searches continued, some extremely thorough, others not, the tiger was being continually 'sighted' throughout Tasmania and the mainland. During the period from 1936 to 1986, 'it is estimated that over 1000 eyewitness sightings have been reported', but adds the rider, 'it is interesting to consider that they may represent over half a century of national self- deception!'(Park 1986 p.77).

The Bulletin (29 March, 2005) headline asks the question, 'Is the Tasmanian Tiger Really Extinct?' Their reporter Anthony Hoy looks closely at a credible sighting by Hans Naarding, a Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife employee in the North West of the state.

The article quotes Naarding as stating that the director of Tasmania's national parks at the time, Peter Morrow 'decided in his wisdom to keep my sighting of the thylacine secret for two years' (p.18).

Although it can be understood that official recognition of the animal's possible return may cause difficulties for government administration and the safety of the creature, I feel that there is a double standard applying here. Freedom of information rules and fees make it difficult for researchers to access current information and laws on treatment of animals can be ambiguous. For instance, a recent art installation at the Hobart Museum and Art Gallery by James Newitt, *To Catch a Tiger* (4 Nov.-12 March, 2012), presents an interview with Dr. Robert Paddle, in which he states that Tasmanian law makes it illegal to attempt to trap a thylacine while at the same time declaring it extinct. In his installation Newitt also presents an account of Naarding's sighting, and explains his creative approach to the work in a Youtube talk, Newitt, James 2011, 'To catch a Tiger'. The artists statement can be viewed at http//www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pAzSb6RcEY.

Although the Bulletin article mentions and seeks to capitalize on the sensationalism of a 1.25 million dollar reward for a positive sighting, it nevertheless does not detract from the article's relevance, particularly in relationship to the creation and commercialization of the thylacine as a mythic creature existing in Tasmania, to assist that other major revenue producing enterprise, tourism. (Fig.5)

The relevant authorities either already know the information to be true or they have another agenda. Another public official, in a position to have access to records that the public do not, stated to me that if confirmation of the thylacine's survival were to be released, then as he put it 'the whole world would come down so hard that all logging in Tasmania would be stopped', (2003), (pers.comm, name withheld to protect identity of informant).

Fig.5 *the bulletin* 29 March, 2005.

'What is going on'? asks Richard Gurling in his recent *Weekend Australian Magazine* article of 4-5 December 2010 (pp.18-23) : 'Animals long thought to be extinct are suddenly reappearing'. Titled 'Back from the Dead', the story cites examples such as: *Allocebus trichotis* the hairy-eared midget from Madagascar; the Cuban *Solenodon cubanus*, a shrew-like creature with a snake like ability to inject venom through its fangs; and the antelope saola, *Pseudoryx nghetinhensis* from Laos and Vietnam. This article also reports that:

> The Royal Society - a fellowship of eminent scientists, have published a research paper suggesting that a third of all supposedly 'extinct' mammals were actually still alive. The paper, from the University of Queensland, raised some interesting questions (pp.18-20).

I used these few examples to demonstrate that even today there is a possibility for a species supposedly having become extinct to reemerge, and although I have in my possession more local examples of evidence pointing in this direction I do not intend to canvas these here. Realistically I understand that it would be nigh impossible to produce further positive evidence at this time as my detection apparatus will need to be in place semi-permanently. Karl Popper, generally regarded as one of the greatest philosophers of science of the 20th century, stated that of every scientifically-based assertion 'It may indeed be corroborated, but every corroboration is relative to other statements which, again, are tentative'. (In Koestler, 1967, 1967 p.36).

The examples shown demonstrate that the subject of species extinction is in fact very much alive in the public domain. In the next chapter I introduce the sites and methods of my own study.

Chapter 3

Choice of study sites and data collection equipment

Having purchased the property that I named ‘Cloud 13’, at Golden Valley, situated on a high ridge near the monolithic Quamby Bluff Mountain, just off the highway leading up to the Western Tiers and Central Plateau, I decided to make this place the central focus of my research. (Fig.6)

The property is within sight of the exact location where visitation by the unidentified animal had stirred my imagination and desire for more information; if there was to be a remnant population of this creature, whatever it was, this would be the site with the most potential for future sightings. Because of a perceived knowledge that the numbers of Tasmanian devils and spotted tailed quoll had declined in this area, and my previous association with currawongs and native hens nearby, I felt that this was the most appropriate starting point.

Fig.6 ‘Cloud 13’, (top left) shack; (top right) foundry; (lower left) wetland extensions; (lower right) western boundary; photographs J S. Parish (2012)

As I knew that a facial tumor disease is killing Tasmanian devils at an alarming rate, I wished to determine if there were remnant populations still unaffected between my property and the lower slopes of the Western Tiers, where I could explore and return to

base within a day. My previous explorations had uncovered some appropriate caves and overhangs that would be ideal for placement of my detection devices. These detectors included surfaces covered in a thin layer of carbon dust, and movement sensing cameras, for which I intended to design the circuits and build as both functional and creative sculptural objects. Although I initially targeted these known sites, by the purchase and use of a GPS tracking system, I was then able to plot other useful placements for data collection in the surrounding geological formations. The most obvious, but difficult to access, was a steep escarpment made up of successive narrow ledges, on which remnant forest grows. Anywhere previously remotely accessible had been heavily logged in the past, as demonstrated by an aerial survey photograph taken in 1945 of the area. (Fig.7)

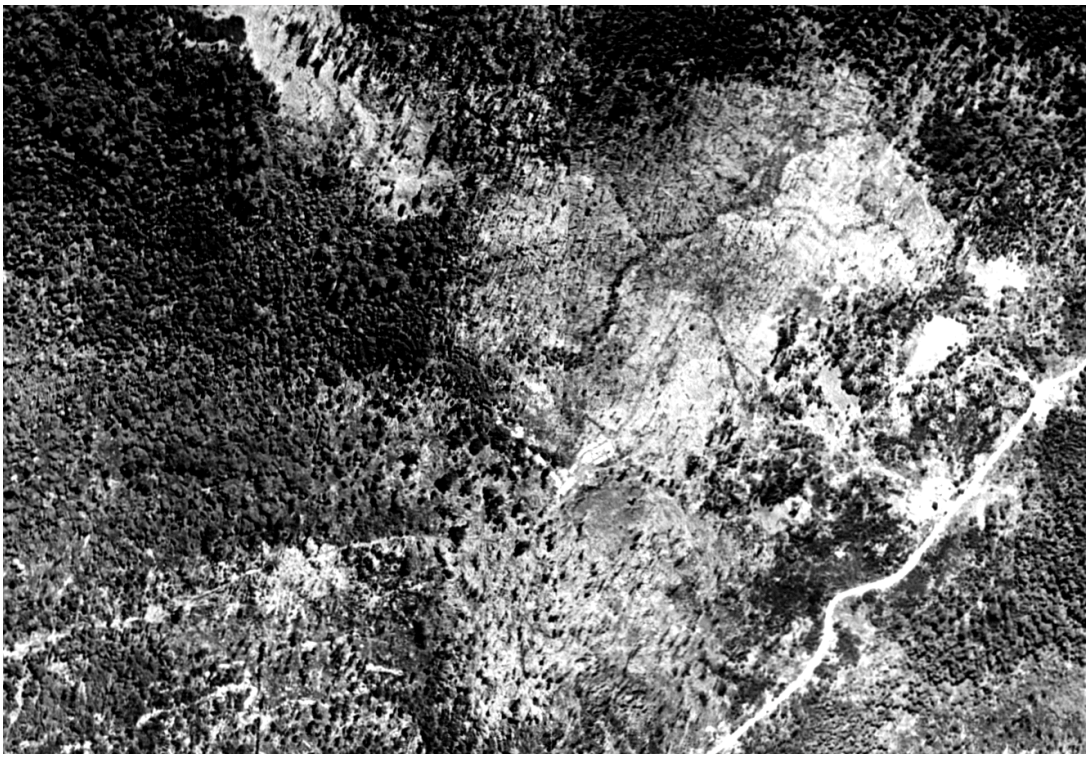


Fig.7 Cliffs site, aerial survey photograph, (1945), Department of Primary Industries and Water, Information and Land Services Division.

Fig.8 Cliffs Site, photograph J.S. Parish (2012).

Thankfully the area is now at least temporarily protected, but as my exploration showed, regeneration is painfully slow when one compares the size of the stumps remaining from the original old-growth forest and those of re-growth trees. During these explorations I discovered a small sunken hidden rainforest valley, where no interference with pristine nature had ever occurred. This small remnant ecological niche was a perfect site for further investigation delivered interesting results for both data collection and art making.

I hoped that a combination of the two research areas, my property ‘Cloud 13’ and vicinity (where other people live), and the relatively inaccessible, remote, and uninhabited *Cliffs site,* (Fig.8) would give me an idea of the numbers and kinds of remnant species to be found there. To add a gradation, I also explored and subsequently chose two other areas of different vegetation, between the first two sites. The first is a small but magnificent untouched old-growth rainforest that I call the *Ancient Forest site*. (Fig.9)

Fig.9 *Ancient Forest Site*: *forest floor*, photograph J.S. Parish (2009).

The last site, which I call the *Liffey Road site* (Fig.10), is more accessible for study purposes as it adjoins the Liffey Forest Reserve which is closer to home. It has been totally raped, burned, and despoiled by unrestrained clear felling. I will later demonstrate, despite it being a protected area, that the reserve is being affected detrimentally by the actions of forestry companies operating nearby.

Fig.10 The Liffey Road Site, photograph J.S. Parish (2008).

Because of a limited timeframe and resources, I restricted the work done on these last two mentioned sites. Photographic images only, of the Ancient Forest Site, showing the beauty and size of myrtle, eucalyptus, and sassafras trees, still extant in this small area. From the Liffey Road site I have produced art works using as source material an introduced invasive species. Excessive logging practice is stimulating the growth of a poisonous weed that is destroying the surrounding bush land, and beginning to invade the adjacent Liffey Falls Scenic Reserve (which is within the Liffey Forest Reserve, already invaded).

The most appropriate method I feel of introducing clarity into the interconnected strands of this research project, at this juncture, is to separate each of the four study sites, *Cloud 13, Cliffs site, Ancient Forest site and the Liffey Road site*. By describing the reasons behind actions taken, results achieved, and artworks created it will be seen that my approaches in each area, although addressed to differing situations, nevertheless are consistent with my stated aims for this research and the philosophy behind it. Other artists, writers and philosophers, whose work has influenced me, will be introduced as they were appropriate for the immediate particular aspect of the work being done, either referenced at that time, or remembered from retained knowledge.

Having then been informed of the artistic creative outcomes of this project, it should then be possible to see how the separate strands of this research can be drawn together, presenting a unified philosophical proposition regarding humans and other species, within the natural environment. Although I feel that an actual physical embrace of such a proposal in today's world is a long way off and maybe too late, not to try to make a difference would be a pathetic capitulation.

Chapter 4

Thylacine research program, and related art works

As previously stated, it is unrealistic to expect instant results in the area of Thylacine research, so I feel it is necessary to explain my reasons for taking this path. My early interest in unusual animals, as outlined in the prologue, and a wish to induce in the reader of this exegesis a little uncertainty as to the animal's ultimate fate, were certainly reasons enough. If so perhaps as humans they would be a little less likely to support a sustained attack on our remaining wilderness areas, so that any remnant populations of this animal and other related endangered species may have a better chance of survival. Another important reason for me was to re-tell through art works my own story about the 'visitor', and to produce a larger sculpture of the thylacine that would touch the viewer emotionally, prompting them to ask themselves the question, 'What are we doing to other living beings?'

Before proceeding to show images of the steps taken towards this end, I wish to introduce a few more pieces of evidence of the presence in my area of an identified and possibly unusual animal that I personally obtained. The first shown are two of the original soot covered boards and footprints of the unknown animal and a devil, while the others are from my attempt to obtain information by liaison with the QVMAG during the period of this research.

Fig.11 shows a photograph of the canvas that was placed beneath the soot covered boards; the lines represent where other boards were placed, all receiving footprints, some damaged by moisture. On the left two circles surround devil prints, and on the top right, three front prints are circled, while on the bottom right, front and back foot-prints also. The significance of the footprints mentioned above, is that the devil prints are consistent with what you would expect, while the conformation and size of the prints on the right are not. They seem to be very large for a spotted tailed tiger cat (an alternative name for this species of quoll, the other smaller related animal being called a native cat), and *no* quoll could have produced the sound or volume of that which we heard the animal make. The three front foot prints, (Fig.12), circled are also consistent with a thylacine preparing to lift the front of its body up against an object. In this case it was

our water tank coop where we heard it do this in an attempt to reach the geese inside. Such actions can be seen in old movies of the animal, *The Tasmanian Tiger: the definitive documentary*, by Craig Wellington 1996) (Fig.13). The animal is clearly a dasyure, (the original genus including native and tiger cats, the devil and thylacine, Ellis Troughton 1965), from the shape of the instep, and in this case the prints are more striated than that of the devils. (Fig.14)

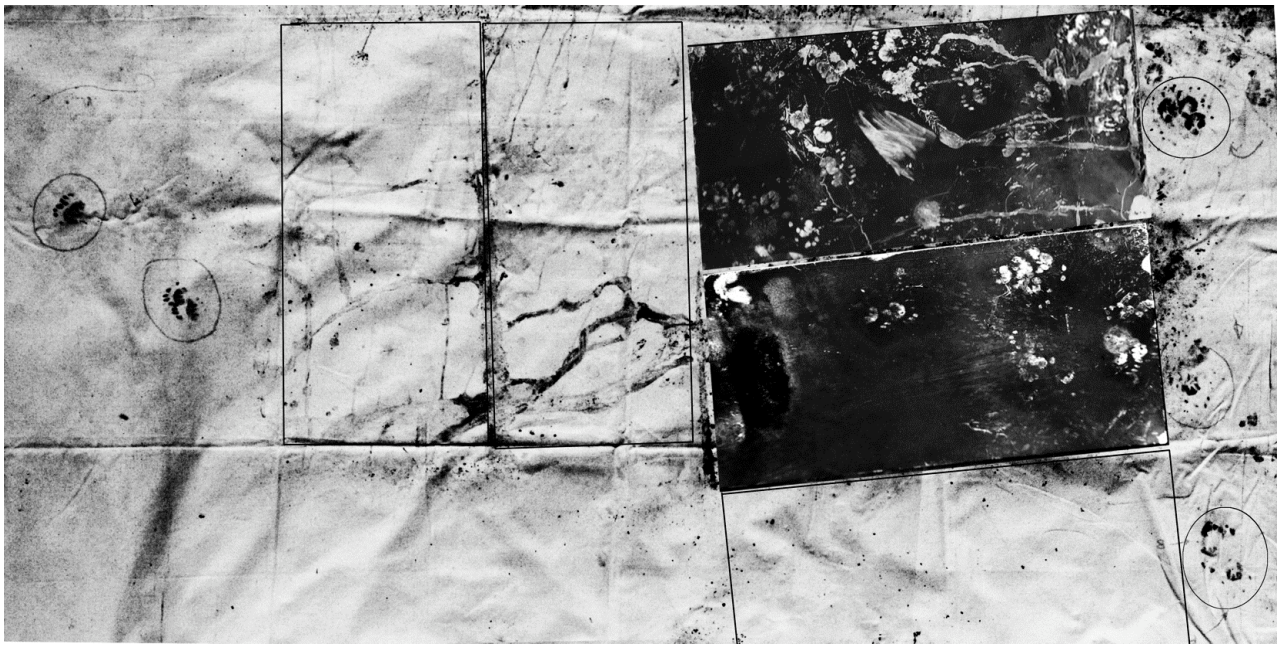


Fig.11 Original canvas sheet and soot boards, showing movement of the animals (2000).

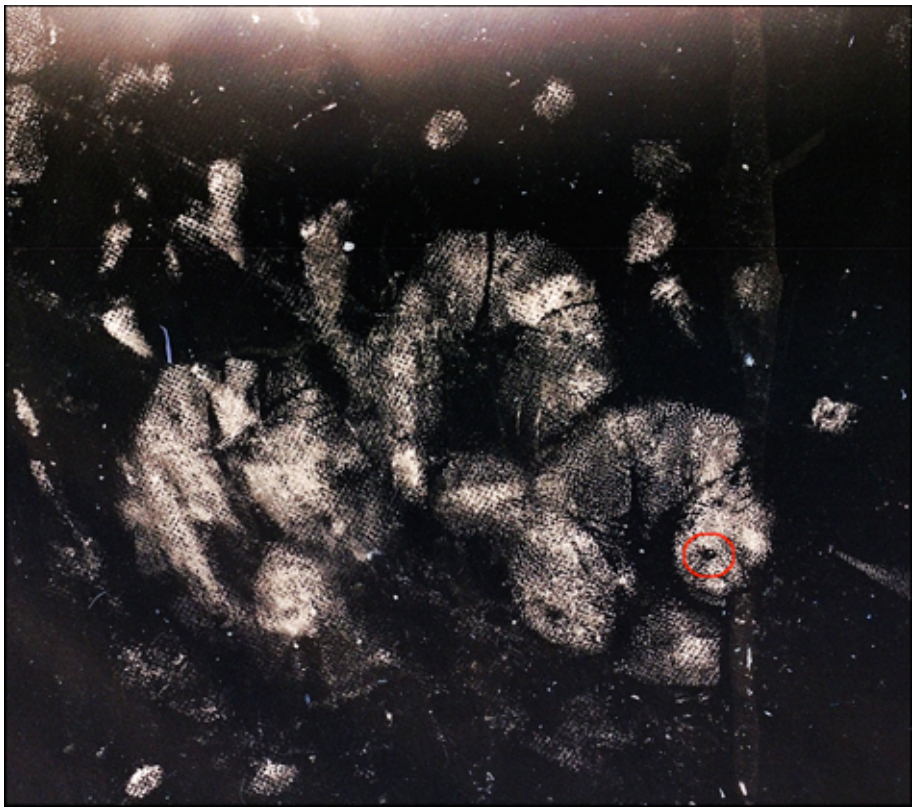


Fig.12 Three front foot prints, above right note small red circle around black dot (2000).

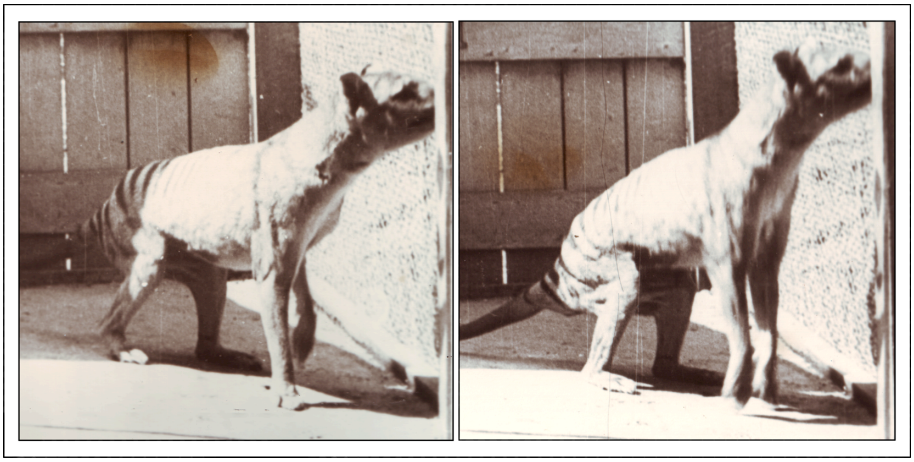


Fig.13 Stills from movie showing thylacine preparing to jump up against wire (circa 1935), from video documentary *The Tasmanian Tiger* by Craig Wellington (1965).

Fig.14 Devil prints from soot boards (left), from canvas (right) (2000).

During this research period I was given temporary access to two stuffed thylacines in the conservation section of the QVMAG. One animal was laid on its side so that I could see the underside of the feet. I was happily surprised to see that the size of the feet were consistent with the tracks that I had obtained off the boards, and both front and back appear to be similar in conformation, but I was not allowed to photograph them.

While attempting to gain further access to specimens, so that I could compare their feet to my prints, I was constantly refused entry until I contacted Mr. Filmer-Sankey (then Director of the Museum) who e-mailed permission for me to do so (Fig.16). Subsequently I traveled to Launceston to talk to a museum employee who allowed me to film a taxidermied animal. When I superimposed several of my prints onto the photo of the thylacine's feet from the Museum, they were so close that it seemed to confirm my suspicion that it was a tiger that had taken our geese,(Fig.15).

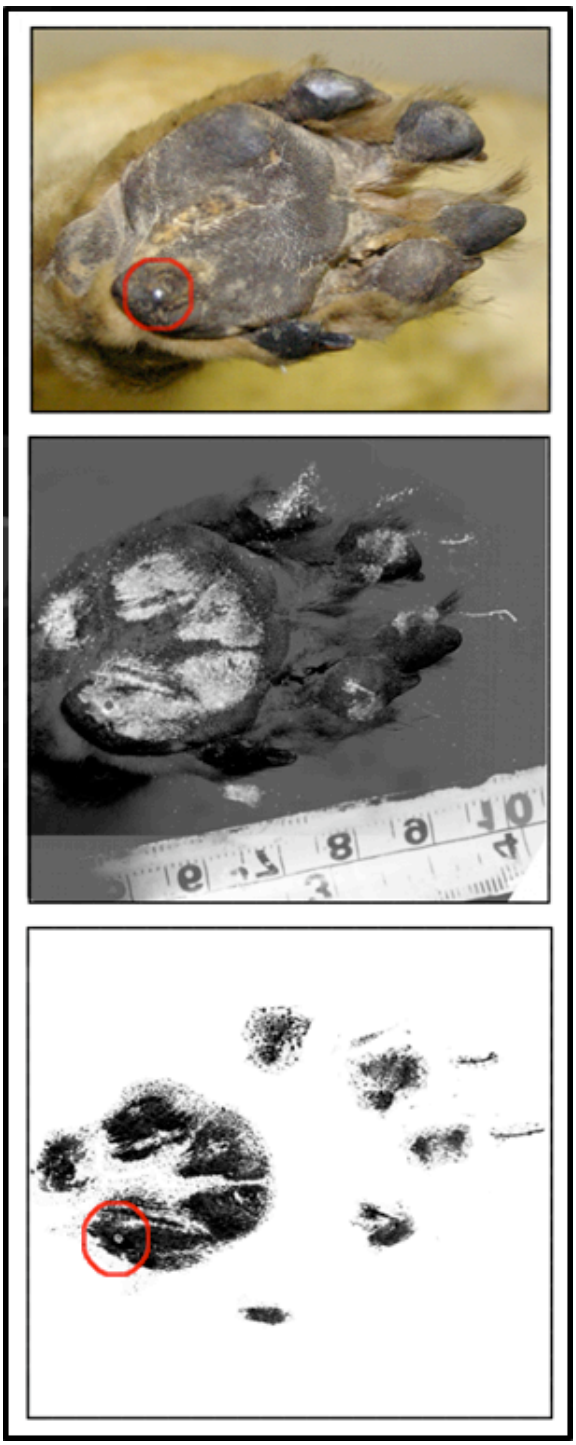


Fig.15 Front foot of thylacine, museum specimen (top); overlaid by those obtained from 'visitor' as lifted from soot boards shown in white (centre); board print inverted (bottom); and red circle showing a shared mark (2009).

When I photographed the feet on the QVMAG specimen I noticed small round marks on front and back feet and assumed that they were made when the animals were stuffed, so it was with some surprise that I noticed similar marks on my specimens from both the soot boards and the canvas sheet. I have circled these marks in red in Figure15.

Of course it is difficult when attempting to compare footprints left by the live animal recorded on the boards and canvas to a dead and somewhat desiccated specimen. The live animal was walking and possibly lifting his front feet off the ground, as we heard it thumping on the water tank coup. The overlaid front-foot white print shown was taken from an area on the boards where its weight appeared to be somewhat lessened.

From: Patrick Filmer-Sankey
Sent: Friday, 12 December 2008 12:57 PM
To: (names withheld)
-----Original Message-----
Subject: Photography of some zoological material

Dear Colleagues,

I have just had a request from a Mr John Parish to photograph some zoological material as part of his visual arts Ph.D. work. He would like to shoot some examples of Devil and Quoll skeletons, (doesn't matter if they are not articulated), and the pads of a Thylacine.

He will call in the near future and I would be grateful if you could help him.

For the record, his contact details are 0418134361 studioparish@vision.net.au

Patrick Filmer-Sankey

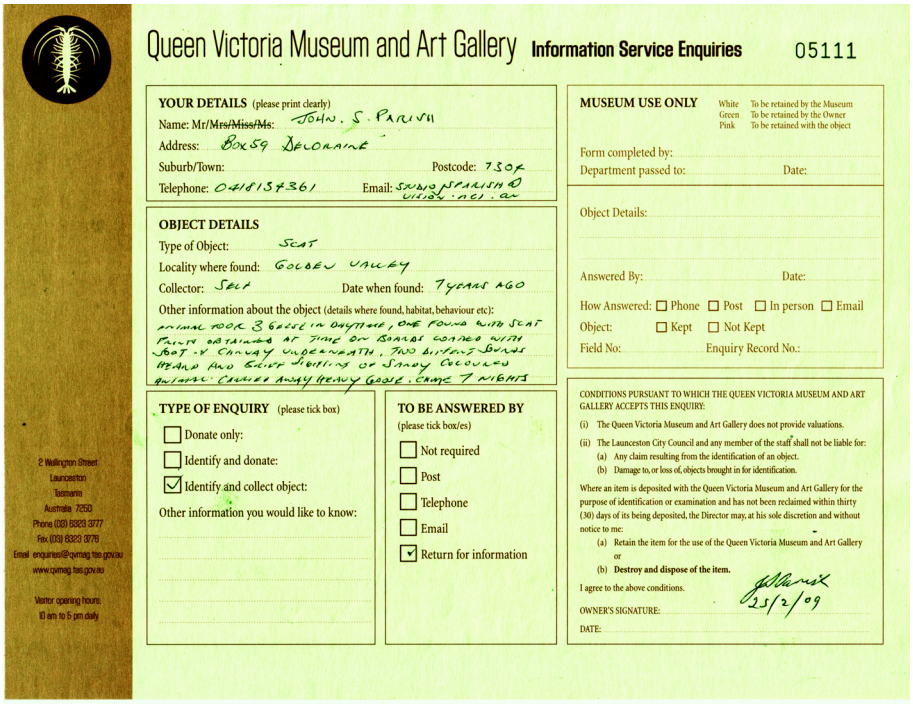
Director

Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery

Fig.16 e-mail allowing access to museum thylacine specimen, (2008).

During our discussion, the employee told me that there had once been a scat that was positively identified as belonging to a thylacine back in 2004, even though now officially they have been told that doubts have arisen as to the accuracy of those results. I was also informed, that a stool coloured green meant that the animal has been mainly eating meat, not bones, otherwise it would be paler. I had collected a specimen from where I had found the remains of one of our geese, and was told that I could submit it for analysis, which I did. (Fig.17) Subsequently, many attempts to ascertain the results of this analysis have been unsuccessful. The QVMAG at that time was preparing to move the premises, so it is understandable that there may have been some confusion, but each time I attempted to gain access to staff who could advise me I was told that they

were unavailable. When I asked see the person who had advised me to submit my specimens, I was advised that they no longer worked for the Museum. What is significant to me is that the color of my specimen was green when fresh. After seven years of storage it had dried out and when examined I was unable to detect any large bone fragments, as could be expected from a devil scat. Instead it contained only a small birdlike bone. I still retain some of the specimen and I will try again to have it analysed at a later date somewhere else.



Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery **Information Service Enquiries** 05111

YOUR DETAILS (please print clearly)
Name: Mr/~~Mrs/Miss/Ms~~: JOHN. S. PARISH
Address: BOX 59 DELORAINE
Suburb/Town: Postcode: 7304
Telephone: 0418154361 Email: SHINOSTARLIGHT@ VIRGIN.NET.AU

OBJECT DETAILS
Type of Object: SCAT
Locality where found: GOLDEN VALLEY
Collector: SELF Date when found: 7 YEARS AGO
Other information about the object (details where found, habitat, behaviour etc):
ANIMAL TOOK 3 GEESE IN DAYTIME, ONE FOUND WITH SCAT FRESH OBTAINED AT TIME ON BOARDS COATED WITH SCAT & CANVAS UNDERNEATH, TWO BIRDLIKE BONES HEARD AND SEEN SIGHTING OF SANDY COLOURED ANIMAL. CALLED AWAY BEING GOOSE. CHANGE 7 NIGHTS

TYPE OF ENQUIRY (please tick box)
- ☐ Donate only:
- ☐ Identify and donate:
- ☑ Identify and collect object:

Other information you would like to know:

TO BE ANSWERED BY (please tick box/es)
- ☐ Not required
- ☐ Post
- ☐ Telephone
- ☐ Email
- ☑ Return for information

MUSEUM USE ONLY
White To be retained by the Museum
Green To be retained by the Owner
Pink To be retained with the object

Form completed by:
Department passed to: Date:

Object Details:

Answered By: Date:
How Answered: ☐ Phone ☐ Post ☐ In person ☐ Email
Object: ☐ Kept ☐ Not Kept
Field No: Enquiry Record No.:

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(a) Retain the item for the use of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery or
(b) **Destroy and dispose of the item.**
I agree to the above conditions.
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DATE:

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Email enquiries@qvmag.tas.gov.au
www.qvmag.tas.gov.au

Visitor opening hours:
10 am to 5 pm daily

Fig.17 Registration of specimen for DNA analysis at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (2009).

Having done all that I could physically do in this area, other than to place my cameras at the locations that I had discovered that would be suitable, I turned to the other aspect of this research, that being the production of art works, in this case wire and cast bronze figures.

A copy of a lost Leonardo da Vinci, painting *Leda and the Swan* painted by Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (1510-1515) and my own drawing *Lily* (1991) have been co-opted to establish a basic form for a wire model, wax and bronze that I have named *the Lovers (2010)*. Leonardo's use of closely intertwined bodies, and my male as potential seducer reverses roles, and there is more than a hint of sexual involvement in the concept of one party 'eating' the other. (Figs.18-19)

Fig.18 Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (Il Sodoma) *Leda and the Swan* (1510-1515); (Right) John Parish *Lily* (1991) pencil on paper 60 x 90cm.

Fig.19 3-D wire drawing for construction of *The Lovers* (2010).

The use of the Thylacine image in a metaphoric context is not uncommon. Some use it in a literal manner, such as the beautifully constructed painting of a female Thylacine with three young pups by Joseph M. Gleeson (1902), and contemporary Tasmanian artist Elizabeth Russell-Arnott (Fig.22). Others choose a visual sledgehammer, particularly in reference to how humans have thoughtlessly upset the natural balance. This is not restricted to Tasmanian artists as two well known and successful American artists Alexis Rockman and Walton Ford do work that deliberately tackles environmental issues regarding loss. (Figs.20-21)

The book *Carnivorous Nights, on the Trail of the Tasmanian Tiger* by Margaret Mittelbach and Michael Crewdson (2005), had been in my library for some time, and I

confess that I had not previously taken a lot of interest in the artist who had contributed the sketches for this book, done in pale grey washes.(Fig.20) It was only after buying a copy of *Art in America*, (December 2010), which contained an article on Rockman by Dan Tranberg, that I realized my error. In revisiting my copy of the book, and after searching his name on the net I found a posting, 'Sexy beast: the last Tasmanian Tiger'.There was distinct commonality with my approach and his, particularly regarding the images reproduced in the book. Quoll, devils and a native hen sketches are included, and his use of natural materials. Mittelbach and Crewdson note that:

> Alexis took a bottle of water and poured a thin line of liquid in the dust. He drew a Tasmanian tiger. Its watery stripes quickly evaporated in the flaming summer heat. 'Now you see it, now you don't,' he said (2005 p75).

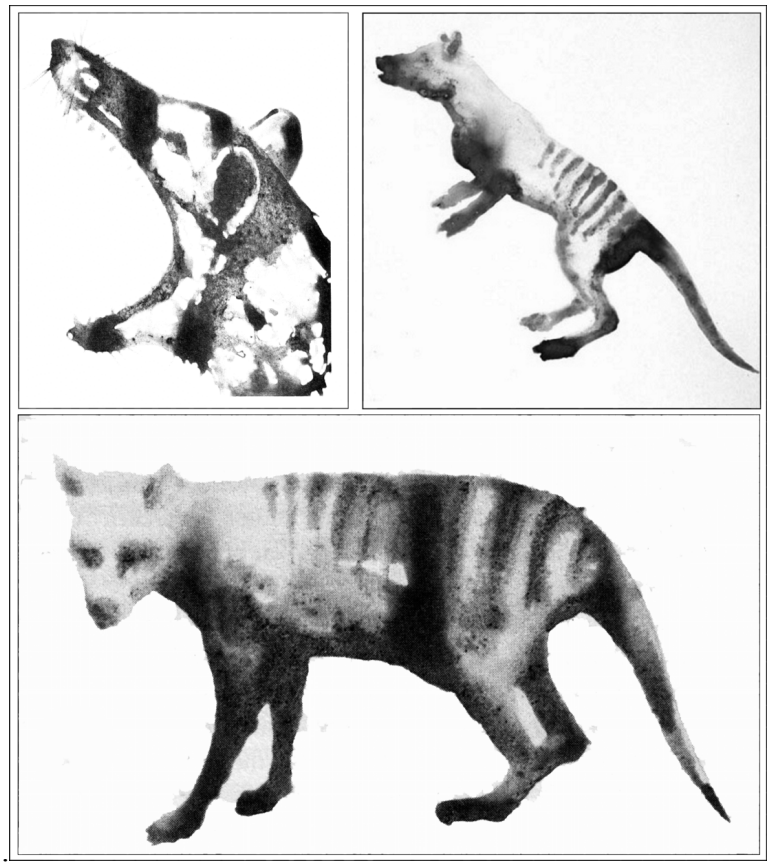

Fig.20 Alexis Rockman, *Thylacine* (2004) Adamsfield soil and acrylic polymer on paper 31x23.2cm (top left); *Thylacine* (2003) soil from Clear Hill Road near Lake Gordon and acrylic polymer 30.5x22.9cm (top right); *Thylacine* (2003) Naarding site soil and acrylic polymer on paper 22.5x31cm (below).

This approach resonates with my own use of raw earth pigments and other organic substances.

Rockman's comments when interviewed also struck a chord with me, when describing his motivations, on-site research, and the acid cynic whit that drives him to produce his magnificent awe-inspiring works;

> I had rejected my childhood at first, and then I had to go back and embrace it. That's when I think my work really started, when I embraced my own history.... The idea for me was to go to a place and create work based solely on empiricism - on what I could see with my own eyes…. history is manipulated by those who have the power… I tried to make history paintings that are about failure and disappointment…. much of my thinking about these paintings has to do with something that will be lost. (in Tranberg, 2010 pp 91-94)

The other artist, Walton Ford, often controversial in his approach to environmental art, in his painting, *Island* (2009), uses a shock tactic to transmit his message. In their announcement of its purchase Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, posted this comment by the artist:

> Thylacines were mysterious terrifying phantoms in the minds of Tasmanian settlers… I wanted to create a delirious image that suggested the thylacine's doom. The painting could be interpreted as the hallucination of either the man or the beast. (Crystal Bridges, 2011)

The pile of Thylacines and their prey are arranged in a shape reminiscent of Tasmania, which is in this picture, sinking into the sea. (Fig.21)

Fig.21 Walton Ford *Island*, water colour, gouache, pencil and ink on paper (2009), 350.5x243.8cm.

A local Tasmanian artist who portrays the tiger image in a literal sense is Elizabeth Russell-Arnott, using her imagination to create a serene sense of how the animal may once have lived. (Fig.22)

Fig.22 Elizabeth Russell-Arnott, *Untitled, 'undated'* mixed media on canvas, 91.5 x 122cm.

Another, but entirely different way of using the image is by Northern Territory artist Frank Hodgkinson, an artist who travels widely in the Top End and who sketches and paints directly from this environment. His use of a direct style of quickly recording images with pen, ink and washes, I find particularly appealing. By arranging his handwritten text so that it relates to, and visually complements his drawings and paintings, he creates a sense of immediacy and a feeling of his direct participation in the scene. A good example of this is where he not only paints the images that he is looking at of aboriginal cave paintings of thylacines, but also re-creates his interpretation of the live animal looking back towards these ancient images. (Fig.23)

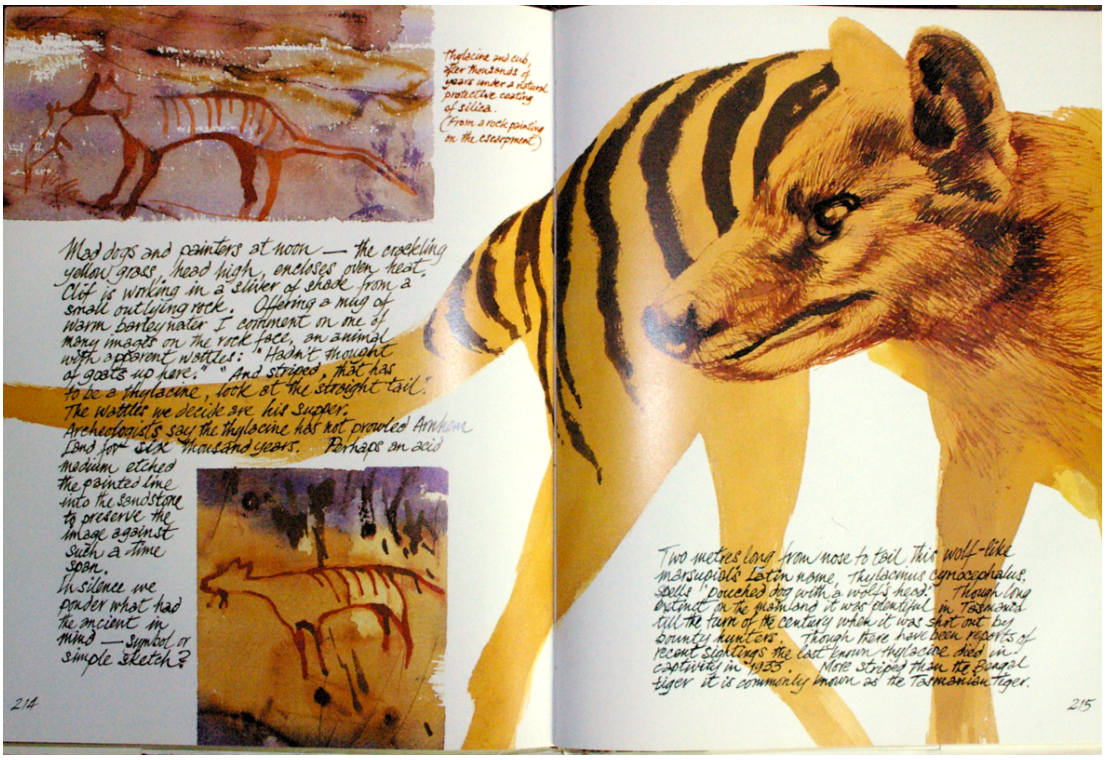

Fig.23 Frank Hodgkinson, (1987) pen and ink wash on paper, *Frank Hodgkinson's Kakadu and the Arnhem Landers*, pp 214-5.

My large bronze sculpture, *Face to Face* (2012) (Figs.25-28), was conceived as a way of summing up the psychological aspect of this research, dealing with the Tasmanian peoples' relationship to the Thylacine, be it as dead history, a possible living reality, a creature of local myth, or a means of commercial exploitation. My tiger, its head and neck realistically formed, the rest an animated skeleton, attempts to rise, meeting the viewer face-to-face. Its eyes are searching for a hint of understanding and compassion,

hoping for a sign, not of guilt, but sadness in an acknowledgment of an injustice done. The small diminished Tasmanian devil in its jail-like, rib cage (Fig.24) metaphorically asks the question ‘am I next for extinction?’

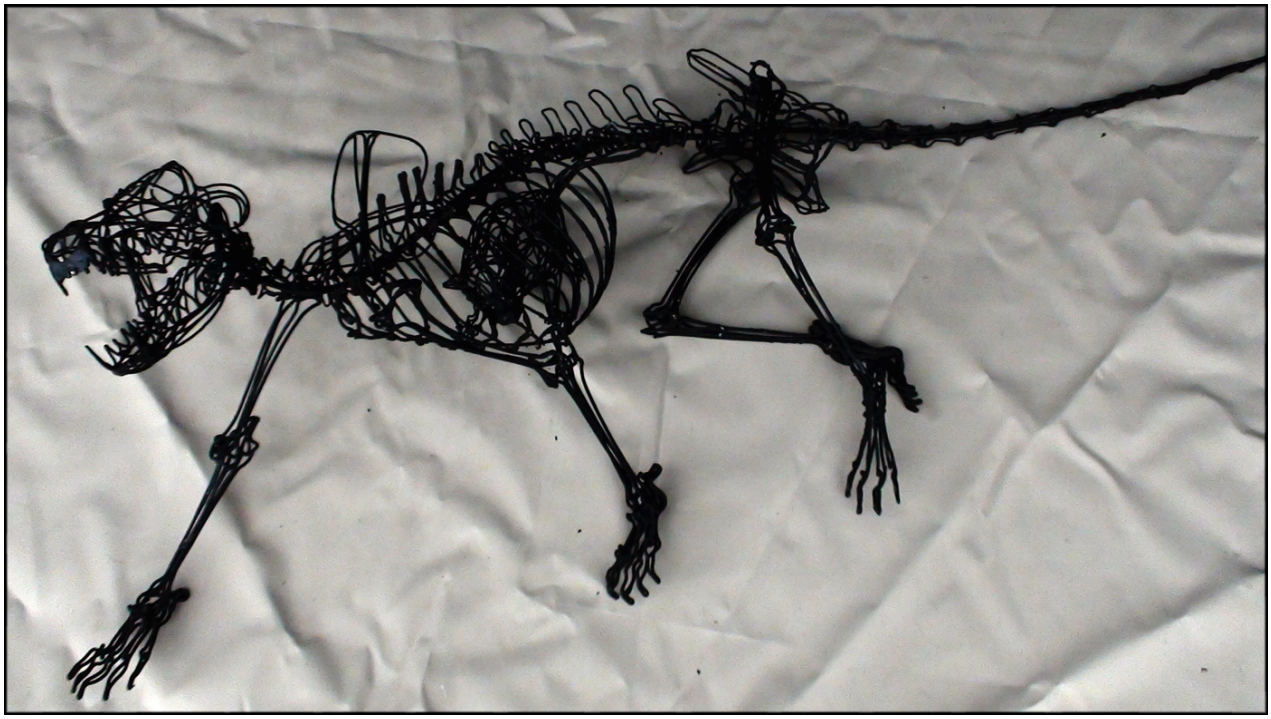

Fig.24 Three dimensional wire and bronze drawing as model for bronze *Face to Face*, 2m x 45cm x 50cm (2010).

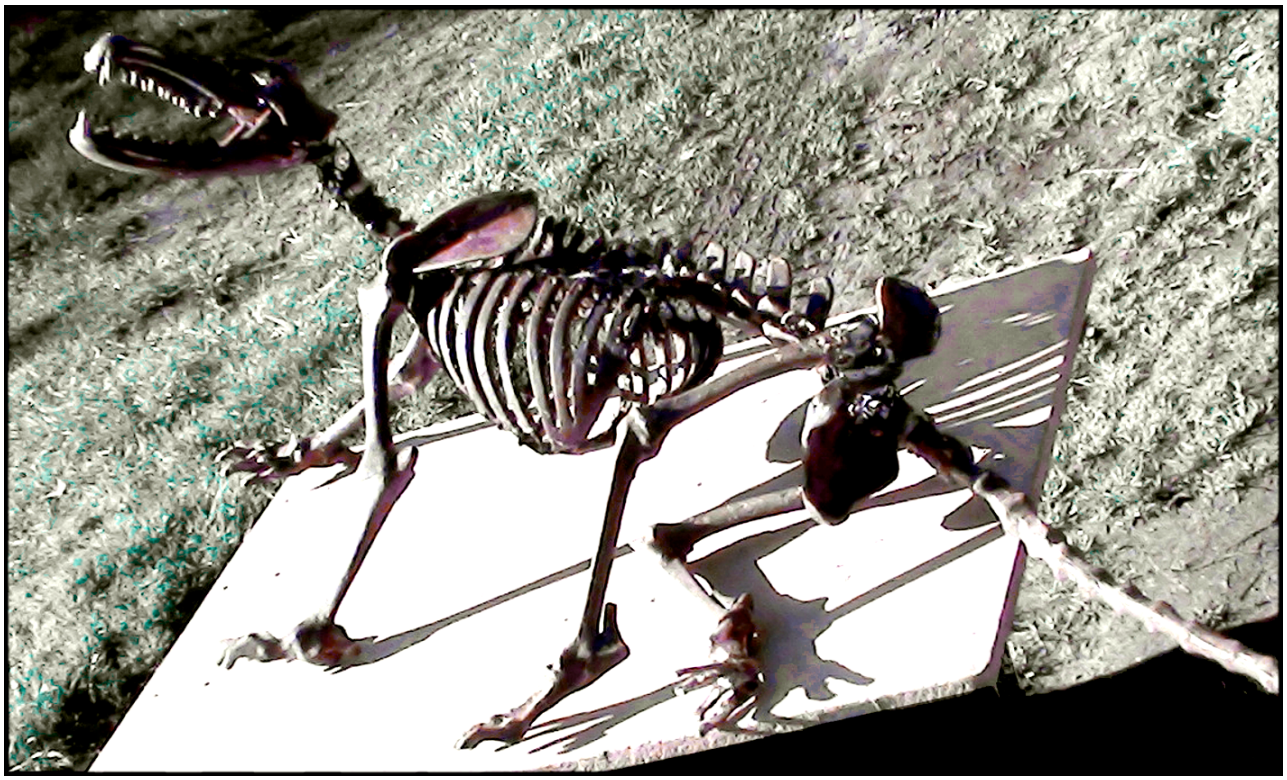

Fig.25 Wax covered wire model. The model was disassembled into pieces of appropriate sizes for the taking of silicon moulds for production of full waxes for *Face to Face* (2010).

Fig.26 Tiger head and wax bones (2010).

Fig.27 Wax bones (Left); Small wax devil (Right) (2010).

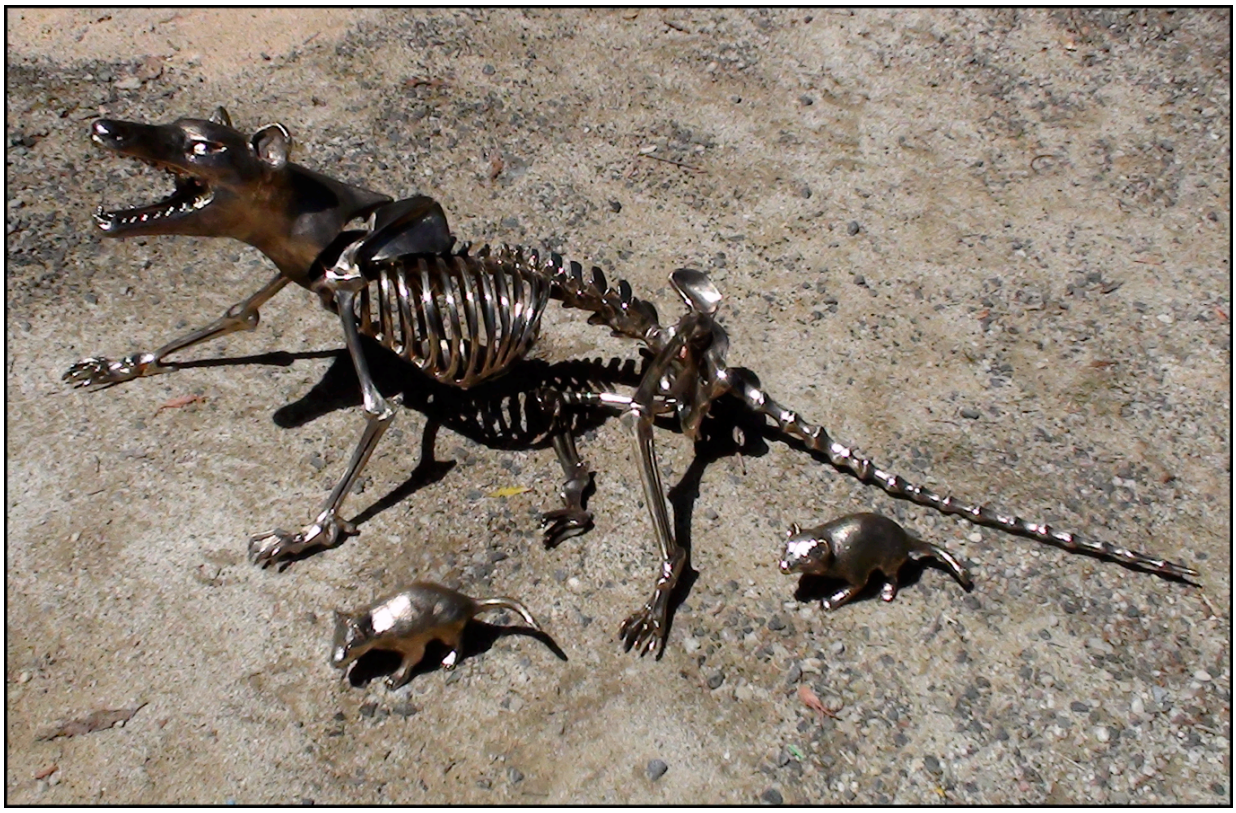

Fig.28 Cast bronze Thylacine 2m x 45cm x 50cm with two cast bronze devils, both 25 x10 x 11.5cm, ready for patinas (2011).

Chapter 5

Sentience, Intelligence and learning in nonhuman species

My research has revealed to me many differing views as to the origins of consciousness, and moral aspects of our relationship with nature, and if or not humans are within nature, or whether it is truly *the other.* Either way, it is necessary that individual human beings make personal moral judgments when interacting with other nonhuman species, and the above mentioned attributes come into play. As early as 1792, in his cynical writings *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*, Thomas Taylor, proposes that although humans have more intelligence, there are other abilities that other creatures have such as flight in hawks, that are superior to those of mankind (p.25) and he goes on (p.26) to acknowledge that other creatures can learn from instruction. He further states that:

> Hence it is unjust to destroy animals, since they are not entirely alienated from our nature, but participate of the reason in common with mankind…. the truth I allude to is, the equality of all things, with respect to the intrinsic and real dignity and worth…. and that anything, when minutely and accurately examined, however vile and contemptible it may falsely appear, will be found to be of inestimable value, and intrinsically equal…. anything possessing sense cannot operate *at all* without intelligence (pp.29-31)

By parodying the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), it is difficult to completely understand whether he is serious in *any* of his statements regarding the rights of brutes. Yet in reading Taylor's text it seems to a certain extent that he becomes influenced by his own moral propositions despite the obvious purpose of denigrating the crusader for the rights of women. This rather obscure philosophical work also refers to the work of Thomas Paine, another influential moral crusader. Taylor's early philosophical proposition and the *Writings on an Ethical Life,* by Peter Singer (2000), both lead me to contemplate on the morality of killing creatures with varying levels of sentience and intelligence.

I found the theory of Paul Shepard, in his book *Thinking Animals and the Development of Human Intelligence* (1978), compelling, in his assertion that the association of early humans ancestors with animals led directly to the development of intelligence in humans. Could it be that the more humans interact with other species the

more the intelligence of these non human species will also develop? My personal observations confirm this proposition.

Shepard proposes that because of life's uncertainty, song and dance act as counterbalances to unpredictability and inconstancy,

> because it raises us above the level of individual experience it evokes the idea of an enduring Entity of which we are part. Because of it we can see human parallel to nonhuman species, for we can see their continuity or natural history from the outside (p.21).

In my experience, birds, having developed their own auditory communication methods, also respond to music, and we humans also respond to the music of birds. I found that I could identify a particular individual bird's song, even after a considerable time break. Could it be that individual birds use the *song* as a framework on which they overlay their own interpretation and information, which would then require them to *think* about what they *say*? I have had an ongoing relationship with a family of currawongs for a number of years, and therefore the progeny of the original pair that established this relationship with me, and I have recorded many instances of intelligent actions. It therefore seemed appropriate to include this family in my current research into interspecies cooperation. By constructing a contraption I called 'the bird intelligence testing machine', or BITM, that added a higher level of complexity (as the birds *solved* the previous test, and were therefore rewarded), I was able to observe the process of their learning to remember an increasingly difficult sequence. The birds knew what I was doing because I was present, and yet they willingly participated.

Fritzof Capra, in his book *The Hidden Connections* (2002), claims that living systems maintain the freedom to decide what to notice and what will disturb them; therefore all life forms are partaking of learning and are all capable of cognition in some form, noting 'learning and development are merely two sides of the same coin… as *mind* is not a thing but a process*'* (p.32). As consciousness is a cognitive process requiring neural complexity, then this 'primary consciousness is probably available to most mammals, some birds and maybe other vertebrates' (p.34). The other form called *higher order consciousness,* involving self-awareness, allows the creatures to hold mental images, develop language, goals and strategies.

One of the subjects of my study, a currawong, either displayed the ability to remember images, or make instant reasoned judgments. When presented for the first time with a whole date (I was in the habit of feeding small pieces of diced dates to the bird after it had summoned me to do so by tapping on my window at 6.30 each morning), the bird immediately flew down to a log beneath my window that contains a small recess over which a spike protruded, by which the bird was able to comfortably handle its large delicacy when held firmly by the spike.

The question that I asked myself at the time was; did the bird already know that the notch was there or did it immediately recognize an appropriate tool? If the first, this suggests an ability to remember its tools (or other tools) and therefore the ability to hold mental images. If the second, then it possessed an amazing ability to quickly reason or recognize opportunities. Further evidence of the birds ability to hold onto mental images is the fact that this bird, and to a lesser extent its family members, remember friendly people, and that after three months 'holiday' (most years this family of currawongs would disappear for between one and three months), the bird and its family returned to my home to once again tap on my window to ask for their breakfast.

In my research into the sentience of creatures within the scope of the areas being studied, I am mainly dealing with those creatures possessing primary consciousness, but there does seem to be an overlap concerning some creatures that seem to possess some forms of higher order consciousness as well. I have also run experiments on what we might deem lower forms of life, such as fly larvae, in other words, maggots, to see if they also display some cognitive abilities, and I found that they do.

The problem then, in relationship to my research was how my interaction with these creatures could be directed towards making art works. In the case of the birds I have made a drawing which includes text as a guide to my method and resulting art, but while interacting with the maggots it was necessary to employ another strategy. In the past I have created artworks whereby through design or chance *lower forms of life* have been drawn into the creative process.

The purpose of the semi-scientific experiments that I conducted was to demonstrate to myself the capacity of other nonhuman species to reason, and therefore to

show the capacity to interact with humans if we are willing to understand their limitations, as judged by our standards of intelligence, and to recognize our own limitations in relation to their other attributes. I know that by using the term 'intelligence', I am using an anthropomorphized term, but I make no apologies for this, for after all I am a human, but more importantly I feel that recognition of this fact in other creatures is possibly the best way to lead to further understanding that there should be a place for all creatures on this planet, as it seems to be the area most productive already. It is particularly relevant when killing is involved, although as will be noted later, I am not against hunting for food if it is done as humanely as possible.

Humans seem to relate more easily to creatures that display more humanlike characteristics, like orangutans, or whales and dolphins as they communicate verbally, and show levels of intelligence that in many cases approach or exceed those of some humans:

> If we compare a severely defective human infant with a nonhuman animal, a dog or a pig, for example, we will often find the nonhuman to have superior capacities, both actual and potential, for rationality, self-consciousness, communication, and anything else that can plausibly be considered morally significant (Singer 1998 p.220).

This identification is important in our present understanding of the need for protection of some species but not those that are seen as alien or repugnant. Nevertheless I propose that with a better understanding of the physical and mental abilities of all creatures, we would form a more holistic approach to the fragile balance of nature here in Tasmania and elsewhere.

When referring to species other than humans Singer states 'I believe that present attitudes to these beings are based on a long history of prejudice and arbitrary discrimination' (1998 p.24). He believes that suffering and pleasure are important measures of how we should treat other sentient beings, but that 'the basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical treatment; it requires equal consideration' (p.29).

In Tasmania the suffering to which Singer refers can be equated to that which would be inflicted on native species by the removal of their living habitats by clear

felling and burning, and by the introduction either deliberately or accidentally of plant species that can deny them access to their normal food sources. In reference to my previous statement regarding the attitude of people to regard higher intelligence in nonhuman species as criteria for preservation, Singer refutes this attitude with the following statement:

> If a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering … of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or of experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account. So the limit of sentience (using the term as a convenient, if not strictly accurate shorthand for the capacity to suffer and/or experience enjoyment) is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others. To mark this boundary by some other characteristic like intelligence or rationality would be to mark it in an arbitrary manner (1998 p.35).

I have used collaboration with animals as a starting point for my art making process, and it is probably true to say that from the very first it was not humans but animals that stimulated primitive humans to make art, often as paintings in caves and overhangs. These spaces were analogous to the internal space of the brain where these images were being formed: 'The cave is an externalization of the head, which is in fact experienced as internal space-dark, image-laden labyrinths where we become conscious of our own thoughts, memories, history'. (Shepherd 1978 p.31). The images were often animals, and the hunt. I have noticed that when I draw someone or something, this image becomes dominant when thinking of that person or object so that in some way the person becomes subordinated to the recalled image of the drawing. If this transference is in fact a real occurrence in others as well, I can see that it would personalize the connection between the animals drawn in the caves and the early artists, thereby strengthening the bonds. In this way animals can be fused with human images, becoming metaphors for human activities. The eating of the proceeds of the hunt also unified physically man and the creatures hunted.(Fig.29) Even today the annual migratory return of mutton birds to the smaller islands surrounding Flinders Island, where I once lived, wafting their aroma on the breeze towards the human communities, stimulates anticipation of the coming hunt. The subsequent harvest and communal feasting have become part of a continuing folk heritage, celebrating life's cycle, and thereby unifying man and winged beast.

Fig.29 J.S. Parish *The Eaten Consummates the Eater* (1978), pastel on paper, wine stain, bones, mutton bird grease and stuck mosquitoes 80 x 50cm.

This apparent fusion of man and animals has been the inspiration and source of much pagan art works for thousands of years and has been integrated into other religious traditions but as Shepard (1978) notes, 'Christianity regards such beings as the devil-gods of superstitious heathens, but for 1000 years was itself deeply committed to the idea of the angel as a combination of man and bird, though it was never said to be that' (p.90). He then suggests that this combination of human and animal was designed as a tool to 'teach both the separation and relatedness of man and animal', and that 'We live in a lifelong tension between our humanity and our animality' (p.90).

Recognizing his own tendency to feel 'raw' feelings when enveloped by nature (as do I) Henry Thoreau, in *Walden* (1997) notes:

> We are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers. It is reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot the wholly expelled; like worms which even in life and health occupy our bodies (p.290).

Picasso's famous use of the Minotaur image, the conjoining of man and bull (1933-35), becomes through his hands an image for public interpretation and private contemplation, whereas the grotesque chimer`a of the deeply religious Heironymus Bosch (c 1450-1516) were designed to penetrate deeply under the skin of the viewer who attempted to make sense of the images. Shepard notes that 'When monsters appear there is some change in the fabric of things, or when we wish to give objective shape to a new idea or new danger, we create fantastic shapes from old, familiar parts' (1978 p.111). Here in Tasmania, the colonial inhabitants created monsters from the marsupial creatures that they encountered in a new and unfamiliar land, a carryover from the werewolves of Europe, turning the marsupial wolf into a *tiger*, and the smaller darker animal into a *devil.*

For many years I have been observing creatures in the wild and I detect in their movements and individual interactions analogies between their behavior and human mental and emotional states. Subsequently I use the animal/human fusion as a metaphor for human activities in my art works. For instance, anyone watching an Australian outback Perentie goanna move towards its helpless prey may well remember having similar feelings in the context of base human predators as they also move on their prey. My earlier drawing *Act one obscene Three* fuses both situations. (Fig.30)

Fig.30 J S. Parish *Act one obscene Three,* (1990) pencil on paper 60 x 60cm

In this drawing I take the acts that I have observed in a natural setting, and overlay my personal experiences, so that the viewer of the artwork is taken to another mental space where subconscious and conscious feelings can intermingle.

Irrespective of whether or not there is a growing awareness of the rights of nonhuman species within the human community, the fact is that human interaction has had a devastating effect on many species, often leading to extinction. Although the underlying cause has not yet been fully established, in this state our other large marsupial animal, the Tasmanian devil, is in deep trouble due to lethal facial tumors. As already mentioned (Chapter 3) I have attempted to ascertain how these animals are surviving in my areas of study. The art works that have emerged were not initially envisaged, but developed through the practice of my research methods, and these also have become collaborative works with wild creatures. These are introduced in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

Art works produced in association with particular study sites, concepts and methods analogous to other artist's philosophies and resulting art

Cloud 13

My property is approximately 5.8 ha in area, consisting of about 1.5 ha of relatively flat grassland, with a spring fed marshy area at the east end, where an intermittent creek forms to run down a sharp incline through a wooded gully towards the lower boundary of the property that looks northwards towards the towering Quamby Bluff.

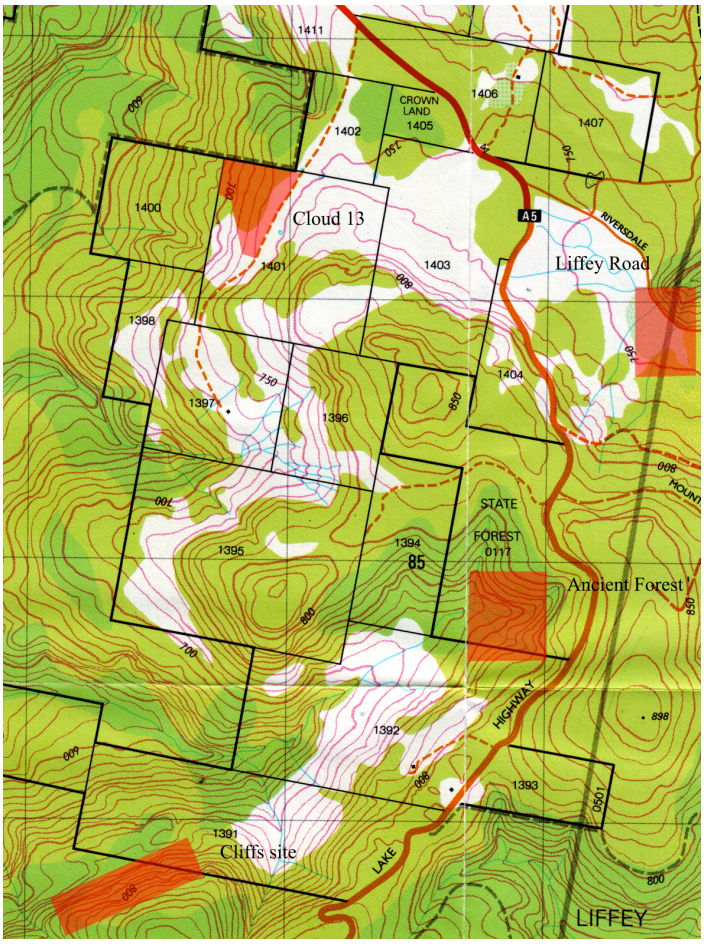

Fig. 31 Contour map, 'Quamby Bluff', sheet 4638 edition 2 (1987),
Showing the four study sites in red.

A small clearing is in the centre of the property, where a small rustic shack sits, built before I purchase the property, below which the large foundry building under construction is located. The rest of the land is covered by tall gum-top stringy-bark and mountain white-gum eucalypts with low dogwood and other smaller understory vegetation. Tree and ground ferns grow in the damper and more secluded spots, with a few scattered myrtles.

A remnant mountain ash (Eucalyptus regnans) reminds me of how the forest in this area must have once looked. This towering old hollow based giant, growing on the west side boundary of the land, overlooks a steep incline towards marshland in the valley far below. Behind that, Mother Cummings Peak stands out against the receding escarpment of the Great Western Tiers. As there are no caves or overhangs or dense scrub as permanent shelters for larger animals on the property, I expected that its resident creatures would be confined to small placental and marsupial rats and mice, living in fallen logs. Birds, insects, amphibians, reptiles and insects are also residents, with occasional visitors being larger creatures that could not find suitable permanent abodes here.

I installed a Swann, movement sensing camera unit in the shack and powered it by a rooftop solar charger. Cameras were placed near my game fowl chicken roost and in nearby scrubland to detect any passing carnivores, and another placed inside a ‘mouse house’ that I constructed to attract smaller residents. I also built a number of smaller collapsible non-injuring traps which I could place about the property to determine the abundance or otherwise of the smaller creatures.

Since installation, the cameras have only detected a small number of devils and quolls, even when the occasional wallaby carcass was offered as attraction. At first there appeared to be no disease on the animals filmed, but in recent weeks a skeleton of a devil was discovered on the property. Obviously it had died from the wasting disease because the lower jaw had been eaten away while the rest of the skeleton was undamaged.

In discussions with farmers and other people living in the surrounding countryside it became apparent that the population of Tasmanian devils and quolls has dramatically

declined. Sheep that die naturally in the paddocks are no longer being devoured, and road kills lie there rotting, until at last forest ravens (crows) clear them up. Local opinion is that the use of chemical sprays is also having a lasting and devastating effect on the ecosystem and its resident creatures, an example being that black fish and lobsters (freshwater crayfish) have disappeared from the local creeks. The use of poisons must also be making a difference to scavenging animals and birds.

Apart from the construction of small tiger and goose three dimensional wire drawings, and production of the equipment that I needed to detect what native animal species were present and their abundance or otherwise, no art was being made at this study site within the first eight months. The Swann movement detecting system had been installed for six months, but apart from a few rats, revealed no devils on the property. I then surrounded sheets of paper with soot covered borders, and placed them in various positions within the landscape. Wet weather destroyed most, but three examples were retained to be worked on and developed by me.

This approach to making art is not dissimilar to that taken by John Wolseley, an artist who I have admired for quite some time. Wolseley's approach to making art is to immerse himself both physically and mentally within the landscape that he intends to interpret. Fine examples of his methods can be seen in the catalogue for his exhibition *Patagonia to Tasmania: Origin, movement, species: Tracing the Southern Continents* (1993-96). His methods employ as much indirect input as it is possible for him to incorporate.

Fig. 32 John Wolseley, detail from painting shown in video *The Smokers have taken the Gold*. (2009)

Mark making by nature itself, (such as the wind blowing his paper through burnt scrub), and by the creatures within it, are employed as a starting point for much of his work, so that the environment becomes an active participant in the process. Like Wolseley, I begin where ever possible by allowing wild creatures to begin the process; only then do I reciprocate, taking the work to its next level.

Wolseley reverses the tendency in romantic landscape art of viewing the natural world in an anthropocentric manner, where mankind views the moods and forces of nature, forming a backdrop for man's presence, yet remaining separate to it. To do this he participates in the experience of raw nature by going into wild places and by interacting with it and its creatures. He in part subjugates himself, and thus joins in a collaborative process of art making, where the artist no longer dominates, working with the natural processes of wind, rain, natural decomposition and the action of its other live beings. Fragments of the natural world and of human endeavors are incorporated into his work at times, and become reminders of the fragility of our own attempts to control our place within it, with physical remains, just remnants, of our inability to do so. My property (Cloud 13) also reveals from time to time examples of earlier human exploitation and unrealized endeavors. Examples can still be seen in a prostrate and scattered section of moss-covered post and rail fence, and a twisted length of rusty cable, previously used by bullock teams to haul crosscut hand-sawn logs up to nearby mills, but now hiding itself like a snake in the tall grass.

A dark mysterious painting emerged from my experiments with the paper sheets when one of the sheets was placed near a small pond at the edge of the road: where a rabbit left its footprints, night moisture and an insect also left their own sinuous trails upon the paper surface. I then added my faint image to complete the work, *Night Pond*. (2010), (Fig.33). The second was initiated by what I believe to be a feline prowler and an unidentified insect, lizard or snake, that continually circled the confined space in which the paper rested until it finally escaped. I titled this work *Dangerous Liaisons*. (2010), (Fig.34).

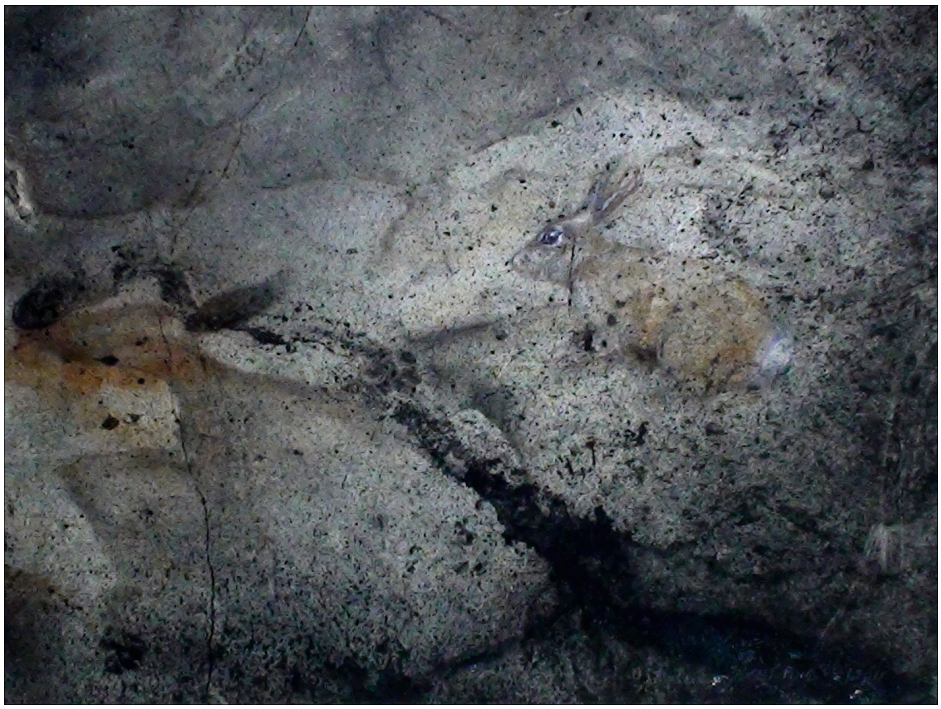

Fig.33 *Night Pond* (2010), soot, animal and insect tracks, moisture on arches paper, J S. Parish input, (top right), 40 x 52.5cm.

Fig.34 *Dangerous Liaisons* (2010), animal and insect tracks in carbon dust, pencil and pastel, J S. Parish input (top right), 40 x 50cm.

The last and more impressive, I think, of the three works produced by this method is the multilayered ant/rat painting. (Fig.35, 2010) I decided to deposit several sheets of good quality paper on top of a jack jumper ants nest to see if they reacted to this intrusion. After about 4 to 5 weeks I checked it out, finding that so much paper had been eaten away that the layers on top of one another, when turned over, resembled a contour map. I coated the individual layers with different dissolved pigments, made by soaking wattle blossoms in metholated spirits for yellow, crushed soft clay-stone for brown pigment, and tree resin to be used as a red stain. I did this to create surfaces that as much as possible approached the colours of the ground.

The really interesting aspect of this experiment for me was that the sculptural look and marks produced on the surfaces had apparently been made by a combination of the ants and a rat or mouse. This animal had apparently burrowed into the ants' nest to reach the paper which had been sprinkled with natural aromatic oils as bait for the ants. To reach the paper that I had covered with a sheet of old roofing iron it had to be approached from below. How it managed to do this without disturbing these ferocious ants is a mystery. My response to this collaborative creative act was to use the natural elements of fire and water, in combination with natural pigments, to sculpt and stain my paper, adding my input to the final work.

Fig.35 *Ant, Rat, Human collaborative painting, under, on, over*, (2011). mixed media on Arches paper, 168 x 72cm.

The concept that the artist today should remain in the background as much as possible when making art, is reinforced by Wolseley's apparent endorsement of the stance by Jean Dubuffet (an artist whose approach I also admire), who said 'Art loves to be incognito. Its best moments are when it forgets what it is called' (Grishin 1998 p.125). Dubuffet is famous for rejecting the notion of himself as an artist, attempting where possible to use natural materials such as stones, gravel or butterfly wings when making pictures, as has Wolseley, and he collected works by children and the insane, acknowledging that this art was unadulterated by art itself and was therefore pure in content. Similar thoughts also infuse the concepts that drive me and my work.

An Australian landscape artist, David Schlunke, has also rejected an anthropocentric ethic in his beautiful paintings from nature, by deliberately excluding human images within the works, but potentially opening the way into the work for those in empathy with the scene. The viewer can imagine themselves peering from without the scene, where a fern or tree takes on an individual persona, inviting interaction, yet somehow still holding us at arms' length. A massive tree stump may block our path, or, as in *Red Scrub Walk* (1990), a partially hidden and obstacle-strewn pathway beckons us but only if we are truly committed. (Fig.36)

Fig.36 David Schlunke*, Red Scrub Walk* (1990), acrylic on canvas, 84.5 x 147.7 cm.

The section of the Lake Highway that winds its way up through the remnant myrtle forest, emerging briefly through open grassland, is regularly strewn with the bodies of animals killed by passing cars and log trucks. This carnage although not intentional, nevertheless is caused by human interaction. It represents a part of the overall decline of native species, so I decided to utilize the animals as well as those still alive in my art making process. I thought I would commence an experiment to see if maggots demonstrate any sign of sentience. Having watched these creatures exit an animal corpse in single file, like sheep walking around a hillside, I felt that at the very least they recognized each other, or was it that the former in-line merely created a track that made passage easier for those following? The main observation was, though, that they all seem to be leaving the carcass at once, in droves. What signal had been transmitted to the mob that it was time to go?

To this end, I removed the carcasses of four different species from the road, placing them in a specially built stainless steel device that allowed the decomposition by a natural process whereby fly larvae, maggots, consumed the body, recording the transition from one species to another in an artistic manner. To passage their forms from initial minute writhing specs laid onto the disintegrating bodies, back into aerial opportunists, the adult maggots must reach earth first. To do this, they by necessity had to pass through an aperture at the bottom of the contraption, fall onto a ledge, and then after *choosing* between four receptacles holding different coloured paints, swim to the edge, fall onto paper sheets below, and crawl away, leaving their individual records behind. (Figs.37-39).

Fig.37 *Wallaby Maggot Painting* (2009), ink on arches paper, 70 x 55cm.

Fig.38 *Quoll Maggot Painting* (2009), oil on arches paper, 70 x 55cm.

What became apparent was that the maggots could discern light and dark, and in the daytime they moved away from the light. This is understandable in an evolutionary sense as they would be more vulnerable in the light to predation though at night rats did prey on them. You may well ask ‘What is the point? My reasoning is that if something as *lowly* as a maggot ‘thinks’ then everything must do so to different degrees. Also these creatures are disbursers of the remnants of these wild creatures killed by human interaction. Yet something beautiful can be found in all aspects of the wondrous natural cycle of life and death.

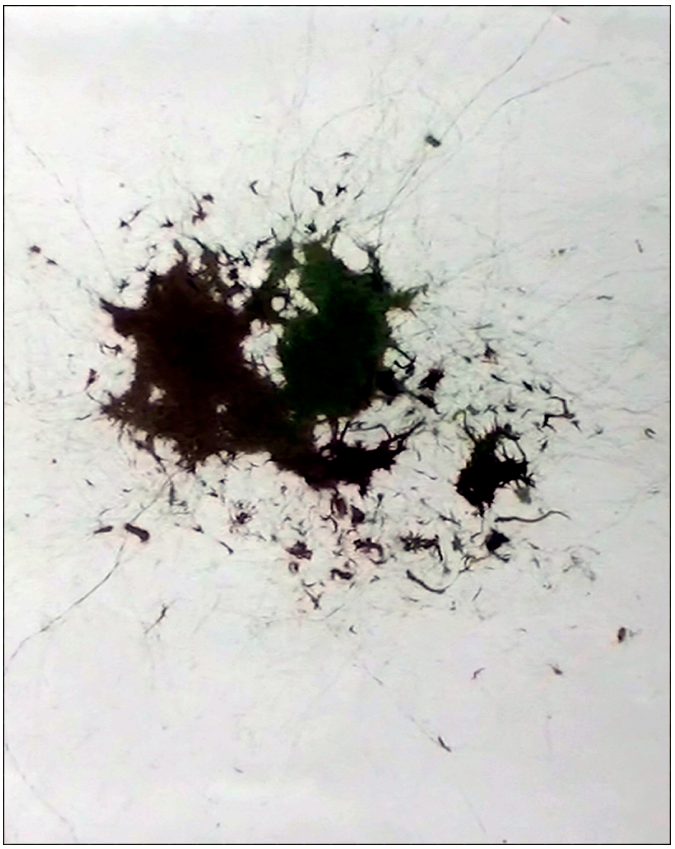

Fig.39 *Devil Maggot Painting,* (2009), oil on arches paper, 70 x55cm.

What I found really intriguing about these experimental works, is that each seems in some way, to have embodied some aspect of the creatures consumed. The colors and styles in the quoll (Fig.38) and devil works (Fig.39) differentiate these two, while the wallaby painting (Fig.37) shows that this animal has diversity and robustness, and that created from the possum looks like its fluffy fur. (Fig.40).

I subsequently created a response to the creature maggot Art, in this case the possum.

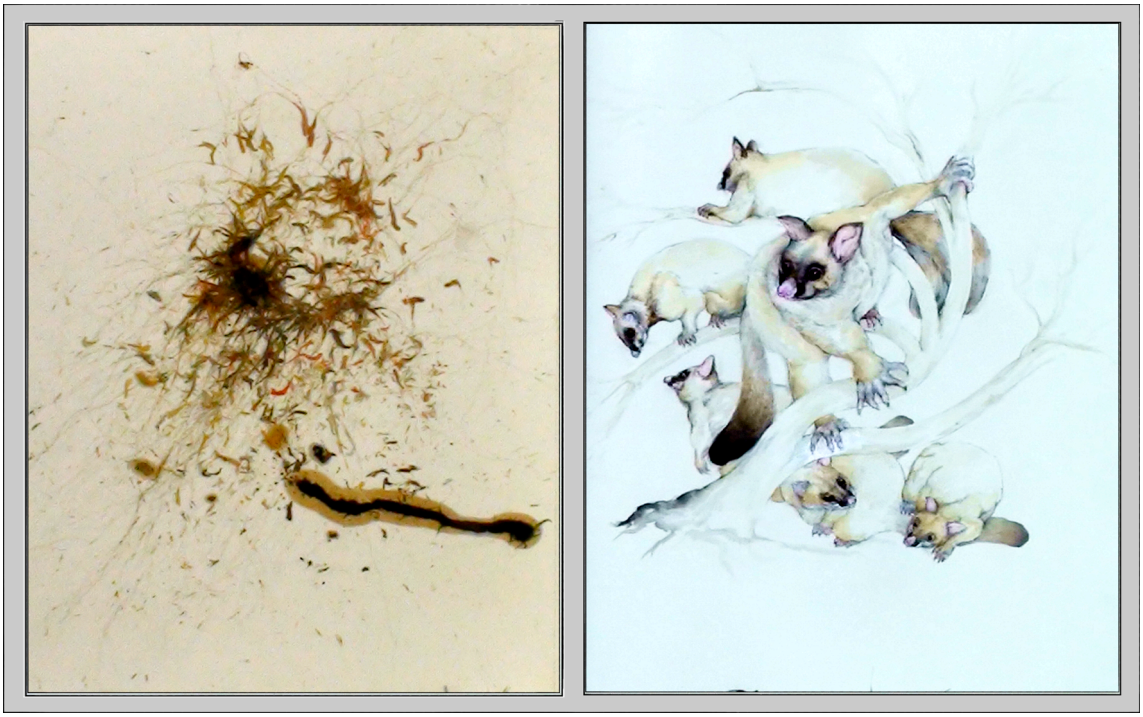

Fig.40 *Maggot possum painting* (2009) oils on paper 70 x 55cm (Left); my drawing *Possums* (2011), natural stains on paper and inks 70 x 55cm (Right).

Contemporary Launceston artist Damien Baumgartner produces drawings and paintings which address the subject of the death of wild creatures on our roads, where they can be held metaphorically and visually, hovering between an image of the dead creature and the landscape in which the creature died.(Fig.41) A hillside can become a wallaby, its inner cavity writhing with maggots. I assume that he is attempting, as I did in the early sketches (Fig.42) for a similar painting, to induce the viewer to question their assumptions as to what they are looking at, and their feelings regarding beautiful and disgusting imagery.

Fig.41 Damien Baumgartner, *Untitled (road series)* (2006), Image from CAST Gallery Hobart.

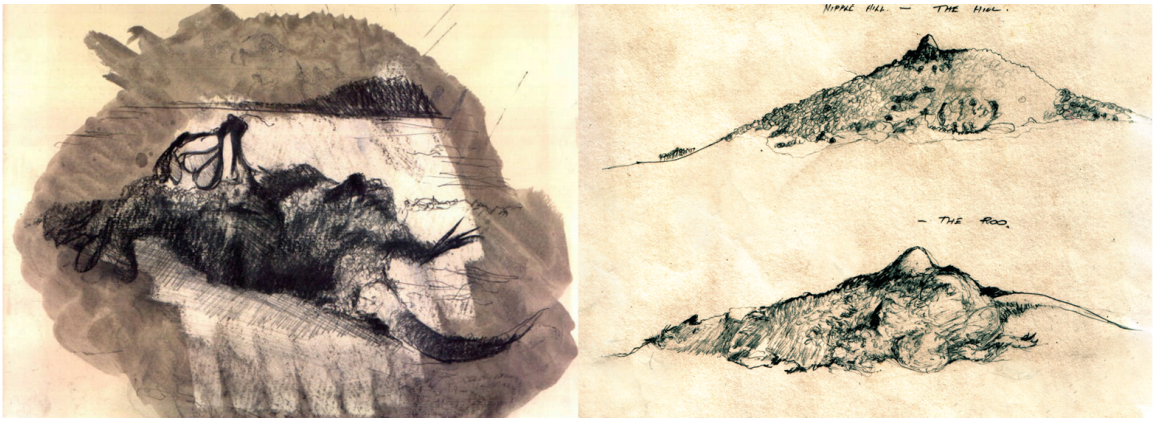

Fig.42 J.S. Parish, *Toll* (1980), chalk and ink on paper (Left) 40 x 60cm;*Nipple Hill* (1981), (right, top), *Dead Roo* (1981) (right, bottom), pencil on paper, 40 x 60cm.

From the sentience of lower creatures to those of a higher order of intelligence on the property, my attention turned towards two bird species living on my land that had both previously chosen to communicate with me, these being a family of native hens and pied currawongs. The reason for, and context within this research program, is that under conditions where wild creatures can learn not to fear humans, they are willing, and indeed happy, to share the area in peaceful coexistence.

In essence my bird intelligence testing machine (BITM), is a row of five glass topped small boxes, the lids of which can be pivoted backwards, giving access to the interiors and their contents, which were small pieces of date. The currawongs had seemed to appreciate these morsels before. I made a series of ever increasingly difficult catches that it was necessary to release before the boxes could be opened. The birds had no difficulty with the first few catches, but seemed to become confused when the fifth catch, involving two separate movements (around and forward) was added. After some experimentation they succeeded, and in a number of movie clips that were taken of their attempts, it became clear that each time a particular movement proved useful, this was quickly remembered for future reference. (Fig.43) A possum also participated in this experiment but was not as adept as the birds were. (Fig.44). A drawing depicting these interactions will be shown at the assessment exhibition. (Fig.45).

The idea behind this experiment was to simply ascertain for myself if these birds could learn how to work out a new task that they had not encountered before, and to do this in friendly association with me, confirming my hypothesis.

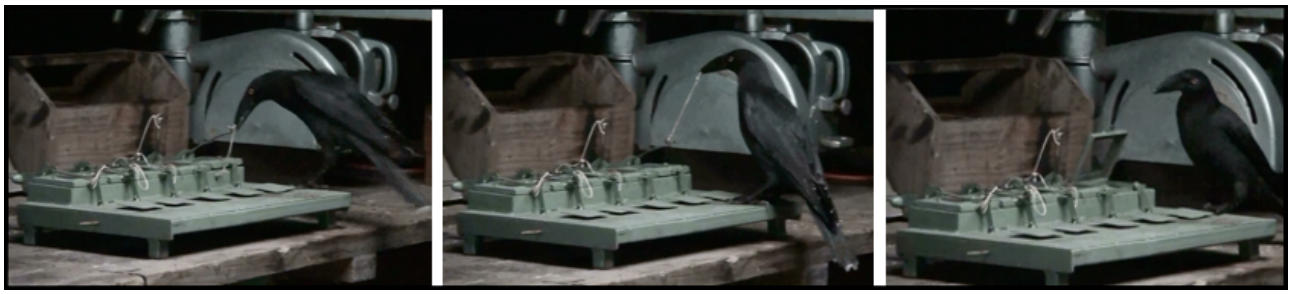

Fig.43 Stills from video showing bird opening box lid (2010).

Fig. 44 Still from Swann surveillance system of possum attempting to open a box lid (2010).

Fig.45 J S. Parish, *Tackling the BITM* (2011), inks, carbon dust and natural pigments paper, 70 x 85cm

The final artwork from the ‘Cloud 13’ series is a family of native hens in bronze, two adult birds and three chicks, as a celebration of a successful breeding year at a small wetland I developed on the property.

The Liffey Road Site

I chose this site as an area for my study for several reasons. It was on the other side of the highway from the other three, it is in a location where current forestry operations are taking place and it is adjacent to the Liffey Forest reserve. The immediate surrounding areas are lightly covered in medium-sized trees, with man ferns and ti-trees in the damper areas. It had been extensively cleared in the past but had re-grown, but has not produced substantial trees for milling.

When I first began my study of the Liffey Road site it had just been cleared and burnt, as can be seen from a photograph I took then. The only life that I could discern at that time was one small red breasted robin; plant life was practically non-existent and slime oozed from deep bulldozer ruts. Blue surveyors' tape, designating areas about to be clear felled, hung beside the sign showing that you are about to enter the Liffey Falls reserve. Native forest destruction will continue right up to the conserved area and it will become an island of natural beauty in a sea of man made destruction.

As the months went by, several excursions to this area did not show an improvement in the numbers of birds or animals, but it did show that a new threat to the environment had emerged. Acres of foxgloves (digitalis), had germinated in the disturbed and burnt earth. After flowering, their seeds spilt on the ground, spread and spread, like the red weed, crawling, crawling until now they have invaded all around, the bush, the Liffey reserve and my own little piece of dirt. In less than 50 years I estimate there will be no natural bush land left in this and the surrounding areas that is not covered by this scourge.

Fig.46 J.S. Parish, roadside photographs, (2009) (left), (2010) (right).

The images (Fig.46) were taken from approximately the same roadside positions a year apart, and since then the plantation tree seedlings have grown to about 2 to 3 metres in height, and are still surrounded by foxgloves covering the entire area. Patches of this invasive weed have now entered the adjacent world heritage area, yet there appears to be no official program of abatement.

In horror at this scenario I plucked these plants, and by squeezing their fluids between two layers of paper in my printing press, created a long frieze, wherein three animal skeletons appear against the sickly sweet smelling backdrop of poisonous juices. (Fig.47).

The Art Gallery of New South Wales displays an artwork by internationally acclaimed German artist Anselm Kiefer, titled *Evil flowers* (1985-1991; oil, gesso, emulsion, soil, foxglove). This artwork, utilizing the foxglove as a primary theme, is a simple shallow glass covered box containing dried flowers. It appears that Kiefer used this 'evil flower' symbolically many times in his work. I understand why, the weed is invasive, poisonous and seems to be unstoppable. An analogy can be drawn here between the qualities of this flower and mindless toxic political ideologies and religions, which can become pervasive in society, leading to much destructive eventualities. The failure of the leader of the opposition Tony Abbott, and the head of the Roman Catholic Church, Cardinal George Pell, to grasp the significance of environmental danger, if global warming and climate change are not addressed, is of great concern should the former ever lead this country. Tim Flannery in *Here on Earth* (2010) quotes Cardinal Pell:

> The public generally seem to have embraced even the wilder claims about man-made climate change as if they constituted a new religion. These days, for any public figure to question the basis of what amounts to a green fundamentalist faith is tantamount to heresy (pg.38).

This is an example of how power wielded by an authoritarian figure over his obedient followers can lead to mass avoidance of inconvenient truths. I think that Kiefer sees the digitalis in relationship to events in the past, in Germany.

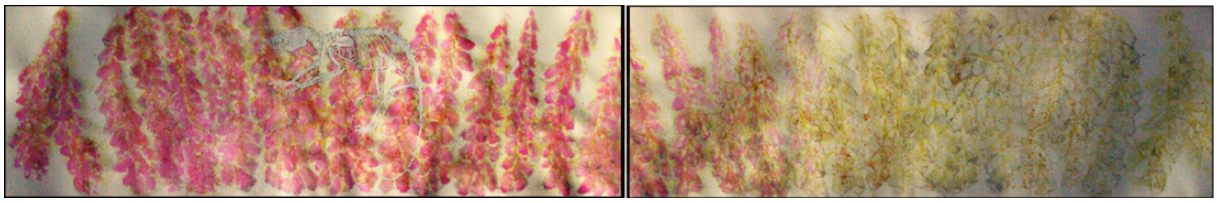

Fig.47 J.S Parish, *Death by Digitalis* (2011), Digitalis juice and ink on paper, two of seven similar panels 34x 110cm.

The Ancient Forests Site

All that can really be said about this magnificent area is that I am so pleased that for some reason it has been left undisturbed even though it remains in an area that is designated as state forest. It would have been interesting to have spent more time studying this area to estimate how native creatures are faring here, but time and the fact that I am concentrating on areas where human beings have had more impact on the environment, has limited my research here. Droppings and scratching on tree trunks as well as evidence of residence by native creatures in the area show that potentially it is still healthy, but its small size when compared to the surrounding disturbed land means that it could never be a major area for species recovery. With this in mind I have only taken photographs of the forest vegetation for display and comparison with disturbed sites. (Figs.48-49)

Fig.48 (Left), Myrtle trees, (Right), animal shelter, Ancient Forest site photographs J.S. Parish (2010).

Fig.49 *Creek-side ferns, Ancient Forest site*, photograph J.S. Parish (2012).

The Cliffs Site

This study area shows a different geological structure to the previous sites in having a high flat sphagnum moss section with tall sharp grasses and spindly trees on its higher southern section, then proceeding to fall over a number of small ledges, before it drops sharply to the forest floor below. Dry caves and overhangs had the most potential for producing quantity and quality data, allowing me to deposit my soot covering sheets, as well as place my movement sensing cameras.

The following are extracts from my diaries, noting 'expeditions' to this site, using voice recorder and GPS tracking device:

> Second expedition. Nov.24th 2008: having entered the dogwood forests I heard the warning thump of a wallaby, but did not see it. I walked up the rise in a southwest direction that took me diagonally up to the lower side of the sandstone cliff face where I came to a sheer rise about 100 feet high. Following that face west I soon came to overhangs that had water dripping down and others that were dry and protected by trees and scrub that grow up in front of them. Ferns grow well along these faces, and passage along them is relatively easy traveling. I came to a likely spot for the first black sheets. Continuing downward, the ledge lead directly to five caves where two waterfalls cascade over the sandstone cliffs. The lesser fall has created a small pool on a leaf covered flat area in front of the largest cave, that is sheltered by dogwoods on its edge, and further out the eucalyptus have grown up to shield the cave from sight beyond the valley. This site is ideal for creatures to visit with its dry internal areas, fresh water and protection from the wind….

….Anyone approaching it would soon be heard long before they reached the site because the land drops off steeply down into the myrtle forest below….

Third expedition Dec.18th 2008: I walked along the lower edge of the cliff where there were many signs of digging animals, potatoos, echidnas and some wombats… I checked the soot sheets, finding that animals had left some impressions on them, and had also investigated by scratching them. There were prints of devils, quolls, lizards and other unidentified swishes that I think were made by a devils tail, as there were fresh droppings beside it. After backtracking to the 'scat spot' to check those sheets I decided to head up to the place where the cliff has crumbled, creating a cul-de-sac, where it can be climbed by pulling oneself up using dogwood trees from ledge to ledge, thereby reaching the flat area above….Moving west again, the bush changed into a much clearer area where I could walk easily through the scrub. I was sure that soon I would arrive at the creek…Then suddenly I was staring down in wonder at a primal scene of such preserved green beauty that I felt I had arrived at an Eden, which mankind had been unable to desecrate, because it was surrounded by steep walls, where bullock teams could not go. I found my way down the mossy slope to the gully below, feeling that I should not disturb one twig or tread on one small fern, keeping at first to the lower edge of the sandstone walls where small dry caves and overhangs allowed me to move easily along…. As I rose up a small slope I saw a sandstone slab that showed the scratch marks of a large animal as it leapt from below onto this rock, trying to gain its foothold. Could these be the marks made by the mysterious thylacine? If there is any place an animal could have lived unhindered by mankind this would be as safe as it could be….This was sufficient exploration for the day, but I noted that this Eden did indeed contain a serpent as a black tiger snake had eyed me suspiciously blocking a narrow ledge….

Fourth expedition Jan.1st 2009: at this first sheet spot I found devil scratch prints on a sheet and the signs of a large snake where it had done a loop about the cave floor and retreated back into a hole. The interesting aspect of these signs were that although the depth of this track was wide and deep there was a lighter shallower snake track beside the first track that seem to be made by a smaller snake, but this track ended in a flurry of activity at the soot sheet that indicated a struggle of some kind, where a devil had made prints and disturbed the dry dirt of the cave floor. Was it a bird that had attacked the smaller snake or was it a devil, but I do not know if ever snake remains have been found in devil droppings….

Fifth expedition February 9th 2009: coming to a place where I could descend to a lower level I found several good caves, including one which is the driest and most secluded of all that I have found yet. At its end, the sandstone ceiling has come down almost to the floor, where a creature has dug a lair that seems to extend for some distance along and under the wall. I believe it may be a spotted tailed quoll. I will put a number of sheets here later, to definitely learn what lives here….It is becoming apparent that there are certain areas of localized activity involving many different animals, birds and insects particularly in the lower level caves. In the *third cave* constant visitation by many creatures, indicates that there is some attraction mechanism in play. The number of

footprints on its surface and the obvious disintegration of a fallen rock seem to indicate that birds eat it. They would then become prey for other creatures including snakes, quolls, devils and possibly the native rats that seem so prevalent from their footprints in the sandy floor, and on my sheets when located there….

Sixth expedition, March 6th 2009: Following the GPS directions to the 'quoll lair cave' waypoint, I eventually emerged onto the cliff edge. Below me was a straight vertical wall, becoming a wide tree-covered ledge with scrub and ferns. Beneath me was the quoll lair cave, but not on this ledge as I was 19m above it, according to the GPS. I decided to explore this ledge another time as the day was slipping away….

Seventh expedition, March 21st 2009: The hill descended very steeply, sandstone cliffs running along almost parallel to the creek, but gradually sloping out and forming new ledges, at one point the whole scene became green and gold as the sun shone through the trees. This gave way to a more open country with fern ground cover, before I came to an old trappers' hut. From this place I proceeded to drop into the sunken valley. At the quoll lair cave I found most of the sheets had some marks and a larger animal had crossed a canvas that I had installed, leaving a couple of clear prints but it seemed to be quite wary. Having secured the images on the sheets by spraying them with fixer I left the canvas in place hoping for more prints later…. I ascended to the second level and followed it around as far as I could, but found only a few overhangs and a very shiny black and yellow tiger snake. I had obviously turned the corner to head up the next valley. After this, good prospects presented on several levels. Another two snake trails under large overhangs looked promising for sheets and cameras as they are obviously used by animals passing along the ledges and one place was a good latrine spot suggesting that it was an animal crossroads.

This was a difficult country to negotiate, but I had located the best placement locations and I had collected indications of a diverse population of native creatures, including an apparently healthy population of Tasmanian devils ranging from small to very large specimens. I had also produced a means of extending the range of my animal/human artworks.

An observation had struck me regarding the devils and their interest in the sheets. They not only investigated these objects, by scratching them, walking over them and in a couple of instances had moved or turned them over, and one sheet was bitten and urinated upon. My speculation is that the devils may be not only be investigating an alien object in an aggressive manner, evidenced by their claws scratches over the sheets, but also by the twists and turns of the footprints, almost as if they 'wished' to leave their marks.

Although I am presenting the devil portraits with footprints and scratching as 'art' I am doing this from a human point of view. I am showing something that is my art, and yet not my art, in an attempt to show a difference possibility for art making, where art might yet go, into an understanding that the real art of the world is nature itself.

I am not for a moment really implying that the animals 'know' that they are making 'art', but that they know that they are doing something different. It would appear to me that they are experiencing a new phenomenon that they have not encountered before and are investigating its possibilities. Weaver and bower birds arrange and rearrange their nests and arches, seemingly displaying aesthetic appreciation. Could the Devils be doing likewise?

Things are made by machines for people to buy, to consume. Subsequently as there are less and less things made by hand, the boundaries set by the arbiters of art have expanded to include those things previously considered mere craft. To me the design of machines is as much an art as any left-handed scribble by Cy Twombly, and indeed, I see art in the smooth running gears, rods, and pistons of an engineered machine. Jean Tingueley made such machines and showed them as his art, (Fig.50) Edward Lucie-Smith, *Art Today* (1983) (p.318).

Fig.50 Jean Tingueley *Kamikaze Monument* (1969), 500 x 300 x 200cm

Video and computer art have now become accepted, as has photography, but these forms of art are no more physically present than patches of light and dark that we see and interpret. What is the difference between this and seeing machine wheels turning or

the scratching of a wild Tasmanian devil? In other words there is intrinsically no actual thing as art, only a word that indicates some things, that some people call art.

I will present a number of soot sheets as I found them in the caves, and variations where I have, using my self designed image transfer machine, enlarged them onto canvas, fused them between glass sheets, and fired them onto ceramic tiles. (Figs.51-52)

Fig.51 these images of animal art are all A4 size: from left devil, snake and quoll (2009).

Fig. 52 Original photograph overlaid by scratches (Left), fused between glass sheets (Right), both 40 x 30 cm (2010).

To my knowledge only one other artist in Tasmania has used a somewhat similar approach to image gathering for his own work. Wayne Edwards produced paintings on which devils and other creatures had imprinted their movements over the canvas, after

passing through painting mediums. He had placed the canvas and paints in places frequented by these animals and had attracted them using baits. (Fig.53) In my work, I have tried not to use food lures in the caves research site, to keep the process as natural as possibly.

Fig.53 Wayne Edwards *Fixed Gulley,* (medium, dimensions and year produced, unknown).

Having initially decided to use a video capture process to ascertain which creatures were still maintaining their populations in my study areas, it was necessary to construct my own units as available professional equipment was beyond my financial reach and small cheap units were unavailable. An extended period of illness that restricted my movement meant that I used this time to design the circuits, build the housings and test this equipment. Ultimately I had constructed six cameras (one later scrapped as the camera failed), three digital movement sensing cameras, one analog movie camera and an SLR unit. Details of the construction and circuits of some of these 'sculptural machines' can be seen in Appendix 1.

Chapter 7

Results and conclusions drawn from work on the four study sites

Cloud 13

Construction activities around the foundry and small wetland area appeared to have no adverse affects whatsoever on the species of creatures that share the spaces with me. On the contrary there has been a limited but observable increase in the wildlife. Currawongs still breed in the wattle grove below the shack, and have introduced their progeny to me. It has also been a successful season for the native hens which had taken over the dam site as their territory, at times driving away wild ducks that investigated the pond. The increase in numbers of the native hens was sufficient that a new group formed and moved across the road. Subsequently only one pair with two chicks remain at my wetland, although both groups visit the shack and foundry building regularly to 'hang out', unperturbed by my presence and the noise of the generating plant when they are at the foundry.

Fig.54 This year's two remaining native hen chicks 'hanging out' at the shack (2012).

From my previous experience with another native hen family that also came to the house where I lived across the road, when I played particular kinds of music, (and

the fact that I run the player at the shack from the solar batteries, meaning that there are no other extraneous noises to attract them), I am convinced that it is the music that is the primary reason for their visiting the shack. Irrespective of whether my theory is accurate, it does demonstrate that native creatures can voluntarily engage with humans if a non threatening environment is established by us.

The Swann surveillance system and my movement detecting cameras have shown that devils and quolls are still present in this area, although I believe in reduced numbers. (Figs. 55-58) I have drawn this conclusion because fresh wallaby carcasses removed from the road and presented near to the shack have not been devoured in a single night, and not more than one devil or quoll have been detected by the cameras at any one time. It appears that the devil and quoll populations have not been high near my property for several years, so that despite the fact that I found a diseased devil carcass on the property there still remain a few surviving devils and quolls here.

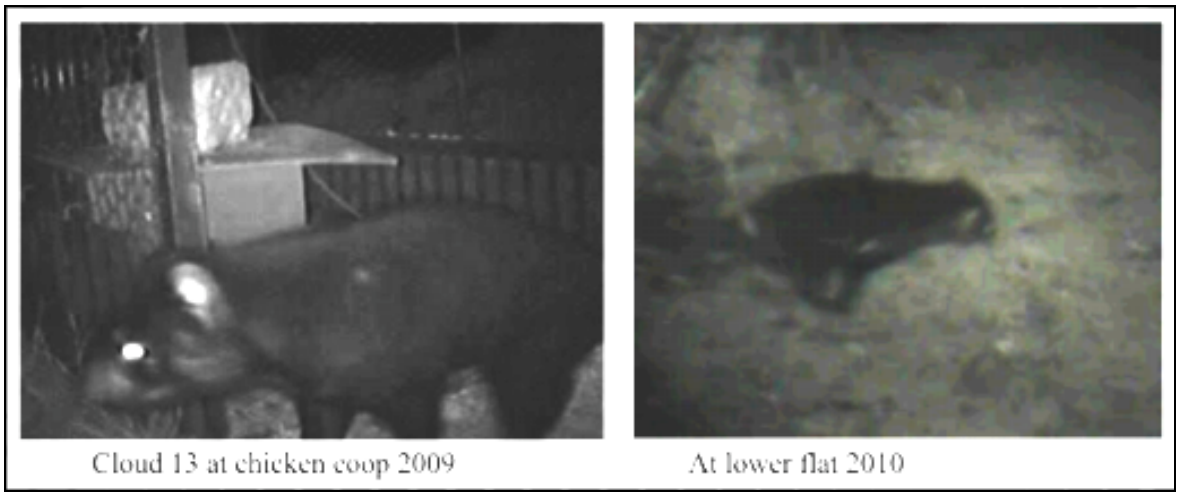

Fig.55 Tasmanian devils detected by the Swann surveillance system (2009-2010).

Fig.56 Quoll detected by the Swann surveillance system (2009).

Fig.57 Devils detected by my movement sensing cameras, Cloud13 (2011-12).

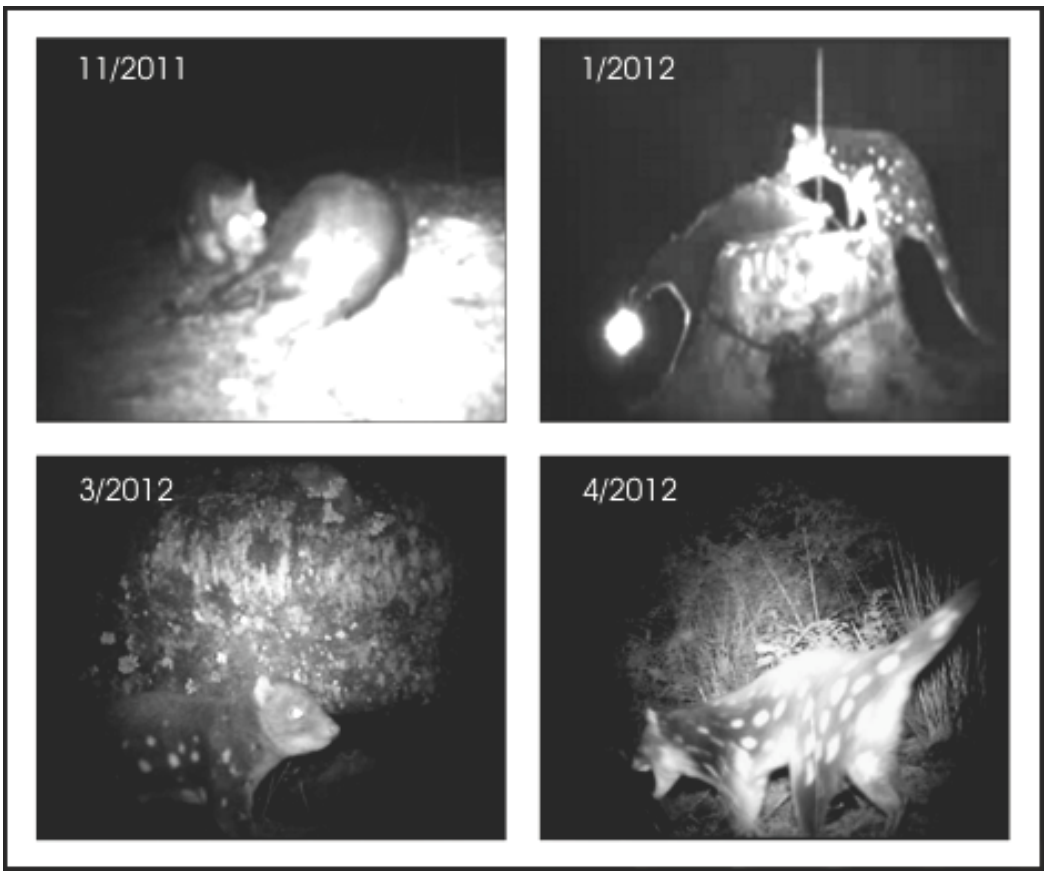

Fig.58 Quolls detected by my movement sensing cameras (2011-12).

The BITM experiment did demonstrate the ability of the currawongs to learn, and also indicates their superior reasoning ability compared to that of the possum. The ant-rat paintings and the other two initially begun using marks made by other creatures, have demonstrated that nature can be co-opted directly into the art making process.

The Liffey Road Site

This site has shown no apparent improvement in creature numbers, as ascertained by my frequent though brief visits, and in fact has deteriorated markedly during this three year period in that the *digitalis* infestation has spread widely, reaching almost to the Golden Valley area below. Patches of these flowers have invaded my own property necessitating the pulling of thousands of plants by hand. No attempt to my knowledge has been made by authorities to combat this invasion, although I have been told that no other method of removal other than physically, proves successful.

Clear felling operations are about to begin on a coupe adjacent to the initial

infestation area, and foxgloves are now appearing at the beginning of the rough bulldozed road into this site. Although harvested many years ago, it has re-grown into a beautiful native forest. The area also contains fairly well preserved remnants of an old steam driven sawmill and railway, as well as Aboriginal shelter sites. A sign previously stating that the area is WORLD HERITAGE has now been removed to accommodate this outrage. Aboriginal heritage values will only be accessed subsequent to clear felling of the coupe. Significantly, a resident living between the original Liffey site and this historic area, who has objected to the changing of the area's status, has been informed that *he* must remove foxgloves from his property while Forestry apparently have no requirement to do so.

Fig.59 (top) This world heritage site sign has now been removed from an area adjacent to the Liffey Forest Reserve: (below) Old sawmill machinery in the Liffey area (2012). Posting from the *Tasmaniantimes* by John Powell, Myrtlebank, Golden Valley.

The uncontrolled spread of Kiefer's 'evil flowers', the foxgloves, has been accelerated by the clear felling of native forest in the immediate vicinity of the research study areas including my property, and will ultimately have detrimental consequences for all local animal and bird species. The exact cause of the introduction is not known but there is speculation that the seeds have come via bullock team feed (personal communication with long time resident of the area). Nevertheless the result has been a penetration, first at roadside, later to previously cleared farmland, and now into the surrounding bush and nature reserves. My inclusion of the barely visible animal skeletons in my *digitalis* artworks has been used to demonstrate how expansion of this poisonous weed will increase the pressure now being experienced by these native animals and lead to their further decline. As a final gesture of hope I have painted the last panel using dead digitalis plants, from which a live quoll emerges. (Fig.60)

Fig.60 *Quoll* (2012), digitalis, natural pigment and ink on arches paper, 34x100cm.

The Ancient Forest Site

What is particularly disturbing for me personally, and in relationship to my study areas, is the fact that the new logging coupe (referred to above) is adjacent to the undisturbed Ancient Forest site, currently designated a forestry reserve. Maybe shortly the only thing left of this magnificent forest remnant will be the photographs that I take. A recent photographic exploration of this small undisturbed area revealed a population of a small mountain shrimp *Anaspides tasmaniae*, 'reported to be the ancestors of modern crustaceans such as yabbies and shrimps' (Lloyd 2012); and the shrimp are also the emblem of the Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston. (Fig.61) Should clear felling proceed above this site there is no doubt that aerial spraying will kill these surviving

remnants of prehistoric times in this small previously undisturbed trickle. The spread of the already invading foxgloves above the site will drastically hasten its invasion here too.

Fig.61 Mountain Shrimp, photograph J.B. Parish (2012).

The Cliffs Site

In many ways fortunately this area will probably remain reasonably protected because of its geological structure and the fact that the regrowth of the forest here has been too slow for re-cutting. It would therefore be of little use for clear felling and replanting.

Initially my concept for this site was to merely place my soot sheets and movement sensing cameras to ascertain how well the populations of native creatures, particularly the devils, were faring. Although this was and still is a major objective, an art related outcome emerged which I had not expected, but which I enthusiastically embraced. This was the fact that the creatures not only left their footprints on the sheets, but also interacted with them, producing what I termed *animal or creature art*. The marks made, particularly by devils, seem to embody deliberate intent, and subsequently

they contain a dynamism that could be compared to human gestural abstract art. In a couple of instances little dramas seem to have been enacted, and recorded on the sheets, where it seems that one species possibly attacked another.

It is only recently that I have been physically able to continue my 'expeditions' into this area to install my cameras and ascertain to what extent the native creatures that live there are surviving. Subsequently, in two seven hour treks I have installed three digital cameras, and later retrieved the sheets that were placed in front of the cameras.

Fig.62 Tracks and waypoints on eighth and ninth expeditions (2012).

Unfortunately, it may be that the creatures are at this time somewhat wary of the machines placed nearby, because although the cameras were triggered by flying insects, they did not detect any animals between first installation and data collection (SD cards). The relative sparseness of animal droppings and footprints on the cave floors does not at this time bode well for survival of the devil population, but I was heartened by two magnificent examples of devil art. These gems were retrieved from a crossroads or pathway junction overhang that I initially called the scat spot, as it is used as a devil latrine. One of the art works, (Fig.63) contains an image that resembles an animal, that I call: *Devil Self-Portrait*. (2012), the other, a beautiful set of scratches and devil footprints. (Fig.64)

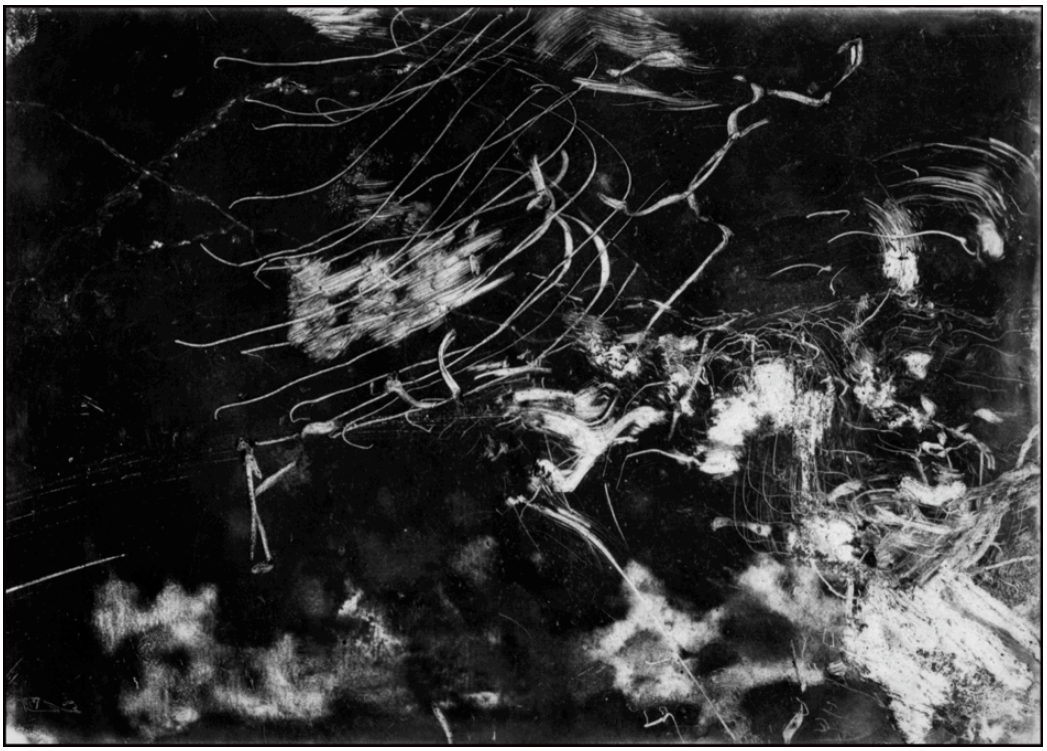

Fig.63 *Devil Self Portrait,* scratches on soot covered clear sheet A4 size (2012).

Fig.64 *Devil Art*, scratches and footprints on sooty covered clear sheet, A4 size (2012)

Chapter 8

Psychological implications of rejecting a holistic understanding of nature and its creatures

Previously, I have briefly outlined the proposition that an association with other species of animals and birds was important in the development of consciousness, intelligence and art in humans. I now want to discuss the development of an environmental worldview by some of its most ardent advocates, then to look more locally, concluding with ideas on how some positive results could be achieved regarding Tasmanian attitudes towards the natural world in this state.

The idea that two, mutually exclusive factors generally influence the way that humans view and behave towards the natural world is proposed by Tim Flannery in his recent book, *Here on Earth: an argument for hope* (2010). These two concepts are the *selfish gene* and the *meme*, or *idea*. Inherited evolutionary traits have meant that there is a tendency in humans and other creatures to look for quick returns for effort, but this will ultimately be to their disadvantage. Flannery notes:

> It's not just humans who have a naturally high future discount rate. Ingeniously devised tests of birds reveal that they also have to be offered large inducements to wait for rewards. Clearly, both our brains and those of birds were forged in an environment where survival was uncertain, and if you are unlikely to see tomorrow, why not take what you can get today, even if it means forgoing greater reward in the future?... The tendency to discount the future helps explain why people sometimes act to destroy their environment, whether by cutting down rainforests, continuing to pollute the atmosphere or destroying biodiversity (pps.213-216).

Unfortunately if this legacy is true, it goes part way to explain why destruction of the environment proceeds, and it is really only the other factor, the meme, that can save it, if and only if, the ideas for conservation spread to all humanity. Flannery cites evolutionary biologist E. O. Wilson's proposal that every one of us contain within us a fundamental love of nature called 'biophilia', expressed as the urge to affiliate with other forms of life (2010 p.107) As a balancing factor, let us hope that this principle prevails.

It may already be obvious that I would be drawn to the writings of Henry David Thoreau, having my own cabin in the woods, and having created a 'Walden Pond' for the creatures that live nearby, so it comes as no surprise that I share some of his ideals about nature and our relationship with it. Unlike Thoreau's description, though, I would not describe mine in spiritual terms. In his book *Walden* (1854), Thoreau expresses his feelings thus,

> I found in myself, and still find, and instinct towards a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another towards a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love the wild not less than the good… I like sometimes to take rank hold on life and spend my day more as animals do. Perhaps I have owed to this employment and to hunting, when quite young my closest acquaintance with nature. They early introduced us to and detains us in scenery with which otherwise, at that age, we should have little acquaintance (1997, pps.278-279).

Thoreau's poetic dreams of a better world, still have relevance today, perhaps more so than ever because of a lack of innocence that pervades modern society. This is in part demonstrated by the hardheaded battle of ideas that eventuated from different philosophical stances within the ecological movement, even the definition of *nature* and whether today it still exists.

Although warnings have been given long ago by scientists of the potential for environmental disaster, the current global warming and climate change debate, as a subject for general discussion, it is of relatively recent concern to the public. On the subject of nature and wilderness, Thoreau, and Aldo Leopold, in his *A Sand Country Almanac, and Stitches Here and There* (1949), were certainly early pioneers in different forms of ecological thought. As the subject emerged into the public domain there arose many groups, and although united in their overall philosophy, they vigorously, and sometimes acrimoniously, argued their philosophical positions. The stances taken then have relevance today, as 'green' groups began to emerge in society, influencing political thought, and at times changing the outcomes of parliamentary decisions, and creating a bitter divide in the community (for instance, the interpretation of what actually constitutes a wilderness), and this division remains still. In Tasmania, there has never been an agreement between pro and anti clear-fell logging groups for a definition of what constitutes an old growth forest.

In the United States of America two giants of the radical environmental movement, Murray Bookchin, a champion of *social ecology,* and Dave Foreman, who spoke for *deep ecology* (founded by Norwegian Arne Naess)*,* a more radical agenda, had been at loggerheads over which approach to environmental management should have precedence; a 'garden' vision, (Bookchin), or a 'wilderness' vision, (Foreman). In an attempt to lessen the tension between what should have been a united front, these two men participated in a head-to-head debate, and were ultimately able to reach some form of consensus on environmental issues. This debate was recorded and ultimately became a publication edited by Steve Chase, *Defending the Earth: debate between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman* (1991).

For all the earnest interchange between them on these two approaches, the reality of the situation is that for all the *purest manifestoes*, the wilderness and garden visions necessarily must coexist as facts on the ground. The garden vision is now the way that most governments are moving with *true wilderness* becoming less common and *managed nature* dominating the process.

I propose that both should be utilized in Tasmania: all old growth forests should be set aside and quarantined to a large degree, while other areas already converted to be managed as the garden vision, including the spaces in and around cities and towns, where facsimiles of true wilderness could be created. In the process this would create many jobs for the inhabitants, and peaceful spaces for people to engage with nature, and to encourage the reintroduction of native species of animals and birds. Over time there would be little to distinguish between the two forms in these places, except for the isolation or size of the area, but they would still have some of the qualities of renewal as experienced by those participating in true wilderness.

Although I believe that wilderness can be both, totally preserved areas as well as the garden approach on all other areas, it would require an immediate cessation of logging on *old growth* forests not yet cleared. If the current expansion of clear felling was to stop in those pristine areas to be protected, then it would require the government of the day to make a decision which would upset a proportion of the population. In Tasmania at this time with the current and alternative governments a truly comprehensive approach is not going to happen. Resistance, obstruction and green politics are still a

necessity, if an ultimate resolution is ever to be reached in the state of Tasmania.

Philosophically for me, big wilderness comes directly from one of the most basic principles of deep ecology which asserts that nonhuman life and its habitat have intrinsic value which should be respected by human beings irrespective of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes. The deep ecology poet Gary Snyder sums up my own feelings when he states in the publication *Defending the Earth* (1991), 'a culture that alienates itself from the… wilderness outside… and from that other wilderness, the wilderness within, is doomed to a very destructive behavior' (pg18).

One of the questions within all factions of the radical ecology movement is the fundamental definition of 'nature'. Is it the pristine biosphere pre-human or is it much broader, the state of the world as it exists now including human beings. When discussing whether wilderness has its own justification for being, in itself, without reference to its value for human use, Peter Hay, in *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought* (2002), refers to what he terms the unquestioned axiom of Western history, economic and technological systems being part of that history, and further questions the linkage between rights and moral issues in human terms only:

> The impulse to defend the existence rights of wilderness in precedence over human-use rights has led to a spirited challenge to what is possibly *the* most fundamental tenets of Western civilization: the belief that moral standing is strictly a human quality, and that no countervailing principle exists to bar humanity from behaving in any way it deems fit towards the non-human world (pg.17).

While Hay states that within environmentalism there is little support for the proposition that there is no real world reference for 'nature', there is a undeniable duality in the concept, wherein the opinion of some, like Snyder, who objects to the term on the grounds that it is argued by some that everything is *natural*, including all human activity including the atomic bomb, and others who trace the evolution of the term nature as a social construct, which I see as causing a deeper separation between humans and natural objects.

Tim Low argues in his book *The New Nature* (2002), that really there is no such thing anymore as true 'nature', as everywhere mankind through intervention of some

kind or other has altered the environment to such as an extent that to consider nature beyond human beings is counter productive. He suggests that Thoreau may have imbued wilderness with a nurturing role for Americans, but: 'In far off Australia wilderness was never garbed in these meanings….If wilderness was God's temple, then Australia must be an early, ineptly constructed effort' (pg 38). In Tasmania, this attitude seems to be excessive, manifesting itself as not just embarrassment but as actual hostility towards its native species and its trees. A telling example of this was a beautiful picture of the endangered Florentine Valley, which I saw recently defaced by an individual who scribbled, 'CUT IT NOW'.

At times Low seems to be cynically dismissing the *awakening* appreciation of nature by a growing percentage of the population in the state as evidenced by the increasing green vote and attendance at anti pulp mill rallies. He describes Bob Brown's reaction to his first experience on the Franklin River as 'he might well have been recounting an acid trip or an ascent into religious ecstasy' and makes statements such as: Enjoyment of nature switched from a right- to a left- brain activity…. Wilderness, once a Christian Temple, became a New Age shrine (pg.41).

Bob Brown became one of the founders of the 'Greens' party in Tasmania which has enjoyed an ever increasing support in the state. Nevertheless Low does advocate that we can find better ways of sharing our spaces with nature and fairer ways of resolving conflict, and 'that as in the future more animals will be living in our cities we should take some pleasure from it, knowing that animals like to live among us' (pg.311).

When it comes to the difficult question of killing nonhuman species, historically this has not been seen as a great problem for humanity, but with the rise of the environmental movement, and the ethical arguments of people such as Peter Singer, more attention is being given to differing points of view. From my point of view, like Thoreau I was introduced to this moral dilemma at an early age, but rather than enjoying the act of killing, I found satisfaction in my ability to provide for myself and my family, and it opened my senses to the diversity and splendor of the world beyond the streets.

Therefore in conclusion, I offer a few simple suggestions for how we in Tasmania can move towards a greater unity, understanding and pleasure from our

magnificent natural world. I will begin with the question of whether hunting is justified.

From an evolutionary point of view, humans are omnivorous feeders, and we need protein as part of our diet. Rather than allowing others to do the killing for us, I propose that if children were introduced to this aspect of life, while quite young, they would learn how to think about and make their own moral decisions on such matters, which would stand them in good stead for later making other important judgments.

Richards Louv writes in his book *Last Child in the Woods* (2005), 'Not since the predominance of hunting and gathering have children been taught to see so many similarities between humans and other animals, though now those similarities are viewed in a very different, more intellectualized way' (pg 23). Children are exposed to more images of animals than ever before but this is coming not through direct interaction, but mostly through the television set. Although I could never be critical of this, its secondhand nature is denying children the chance for a more rewarding experience, because it reinforces the sense of nature being *the other*. The fact that animals are being presented so often in this way for commercial reasons, and that advertising usurps these images as a proxy for real life, but also actually demonstrates that humans still *need* animals.

The sedentary nature of children's activities, hours spent in a drug-like dependence on computer games, where they are more likely to know the names of Pokémon than native species, is creating a situation where children actually prefer to do this rather than spend time outdoors. I feel that as parents we *must* begin early in their lives, to take them into the forest or on to the beach and help them to enjoy this freedom without fear, and learn about the natural world.

I believe that fear is being passed on to the younger generation by our own concerns that children will not have the capacity to make the right judgments, and therefore to keep themselves safe. Spending time in the forest, mountain side, or in a stream or river, as we did as children, allowed us the freedom, resilience, self-reliance and creativity that we are not allowing our own offspring today.

We in Tasmania and elsewhere need to think carefully about how we may be defacing our children's emotional and psychological futures, if we do not help our kids reestablish a unity with nature and its wild creatures. In doing so, we will also enrich our own lives.

Conclusion

Although from the very beginning of human development, depiction of animals has been central to the evolution of what today we call art, and at times animals have been co-opted into making marks that are described and sold as art works, the commercialization of this phenomenon has never been foremost in my thoughts. In the case of this research, as previously stated, I did not initially set out to make 'creature art'. In the case of the devil, quoll and snake works these were happy accidents that I recognized had the potential for further exploration as a creative resource that could be maintained substantially in their original 'pure' form. The bird and maggot works are the result of an experimental process that originated from a philosophical questioning of a common assumption that human beings have a monopoly on thought processes and associated learning, yet within this restraint there was potential for artistic expression. Ultimately these works emerged simply from my empirical data collection methods.

This approach is consistent with my previous use of diverse source material, usually events, places and creatures that I encounter in nature, that slowly form into concepts that develop and change as I begin to physically and visually express them. In other words the original idea for a work comes from nature, the final result emerging from the exploratory physical act of making something indefinite happen.

By a minimal intervention on my part I was able to present them as art works easily recognized by the general public because of previous exposure to similar abstract imagery. By identifying the originators it was possible for the viewer to imagine themselves observing the animal making the marks and to ask themselves the question, 'if I am looking at these objects that look like art and if I did not know that a human did not make them, I would accept them as art objects; what, then, is a real artwork?'

It can be pointed out that without my part in the process they could not even be presented, and my use of high quality framing highlights this fact, and of course this introduced the Duchampian notion that anything presented in an art context can be considered as art. It may have been noticed that earlier in this text that I question the definition of what constitutes an artwork today, but it is not really art that concerns me

so much as the viewers aesthetic appreciation of the animals participation and the resulting record of this creative act, remembering that this is being enacted out in the natural world.

By asking the question 'what can artists do to elevate public awareness of destructive environmental practices that are upsetting the ecological balance?' it is incumbent on me to evaluate if the accompanying exhibition to this thesis has achieved anything in this regard. This part of my initial premise needs to be evaluated over time and public access to the work.

To have any chance of getting a message across in a media saturated world where carefully considered analysis has been dumbed down for general consumption, particularly in Tasmania where a large percentage of the population are functionally illiterate, unfortunately it may be necessary to use personal emotional response rather than reasoned argument to engage the masses. Publicists know that animals will get attention and in certain situations they can be used to produce emotional responses, usually positively warming. An artist who successfully used both the ubiquity of the moving image and an unsettling emotional reaction to the boredom and hopelessness of caged animals is Richard Billingham in his silent installation '*People, Places, Animals*' at the Australian Centre of Contemporary Art (2008). An approach such as this can be powerful, but in presenting my work I have used the intrigue created by a juxtaposition of visual beauty against the supposedly base nature of wild animals and crawling things. The idea was to suggest an avenue for the viewer to contemplate how these qualities could sit comfortably together. Although I cannot say for sure, I feel that such exposure may have potential for further reflection in the future.

In looking to the other sections of the abstract, I feel that progress has been made.

The design and construction of my movement sensing cameras, which have now been superseded by recently introduced commercially available models, and soot sheet method of identifying native species at my study sites worked well and were unusual in that they allowed a creative transition from an engineering and scientific starting point that evolved into an acceptable artistic format.

Reference to past and present rediscovery of creatures thought to be extinct demonstrate that this is within the realm of possibility and I feel that documentation of my own experiences in this area should induce the reader to at least not close their minds to what would be a miraculous occurrence should the Thylacine be shown to have at least temporarily avoided extinction's stranglehold.

My research data collection methods have indicated a decline in the devil numbers but a better result for quolls than expected, but I was disappointed in that I was unable to have the cameras employed for longer periods for a more accurate evaluation. Nevertheless in approaching my research in a less art focused direction initially, it was possible to be less constrained by the usual parameters that define art making methods and to finally produce much of the work that went beyond them.

In conducting this research I initially began with only two central ideas in mind, these being to become knowledgeable regarding the landforms in the vicinity of my property and to evaluate the health of the area and the creatures within it. My exploration and observations of the native creatures developed into diverging streams of thought on such matters as creature intelligence and human interaction with the local populations. As my specific research into the four different locations chosen for study required different approaches it became necessary for me to draw them together into philosophical, artistic and literary unity. I feel that I was able to do this successfully and the experience has left many avenues open for further creative research along these various lines.

My cameras are still deployed and I feel that there is much more room for creativity in this area. In the immediate future I feel that I should consolidate this research into an expanded body of work that can be presented more broadly to the wider community.

A question that I have had to ask myself during this research project is, 'what would I do if I did discover information that could be detrimental to the animal species involved, would I make it publicly available'? My answer is 'probably not'.

I began this thesis with a statement that it is based on uncertainty. In the three and a half years it has taken to complete this project, the political situation in Tasmania (and indeed worldwide attitudes in relationship to climate change), has not increased any optimism left within me that positive changes will be made in the near future. I think little will change in the short term, and only hope that more will be addressed in the long-term. Whatever contributions an artist can make to this change, I hope that this work may encourage others to make environmental protection part of their goals also.

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Appendix 1 : the movement-sensing camera system

The planning and design of my movement-sensing systems began by utilizing two available analog cameras that I had on hand, these being a Pentax SLR and a Sony 8mm movie camera. Using very basic components from discarded photocopiers such as relays and solenoids, coupled with commercially available movement sensors, I was able to construct workable models which were somewhat bulky and their battery supplies did not run for very long. Although the SLR could be triggered instantaneously by the movement sensor via a 12 v relay activating a solenoid which pressed the release button, the movie camera and a later digital movie camera unit needed to be turned on approximately 2 seconds before these could be fully activated to record the scene. It was therefore necessary to include timer units to delay the solenoid activated switches for the appropriate time, so these were included. These units were cumbersome and difficult to build and wire the circuits, but in doing so I had to address and solve many problems. I found this to be interesting and stimulating as it involved both engineering and electronics, but at this stage form was not a particularly important factor, therefore I sought other avenues for achieving my aims of arriving at both form and function to see them as *art* objects.

Having found small battery powered computer-controlled portable security recorders that saved video and audio data, I purchased three units. Small SD cards recorded the movement of anything within range in MPEG4 when external infrared cameras were attached via the AV IN plug. This method seemed at first to be simple but I soon found their batteries, like the analog units, did not sustain long if left permanently on, which they needed to be if located in isolated situations. I found that I could isolate the sensing units which did not consume much power, and used them to trip a relay system which switched on a timer unit which ran for an allotment time sequence. This in turn powered the camera and computer via a larger sealed wet cell battery (coupled to a solar charger), which after recording switched them both off saving power. (Fig.65)

Although I did have some difficulty matching components which used different voltages and at times different waveforms (for instance, the security recorders simply refused to work consistently when powered by small electronic transformers which were much smaller than the larger multiple selection older type units that they seem to

prefer). Having solved the electronic components, I built the camera cases as small as possible to include all the parts necessary and yet to externally appear as neat and interesting objects, that would also not deter the wild creatures to be filmed from approaching them. (Fig.66) The last unit I built is powered by a small 240V transformer allowing me to use the computers own 3v step down, and is designed to be both practically and aesthetically consistent both inside and out.

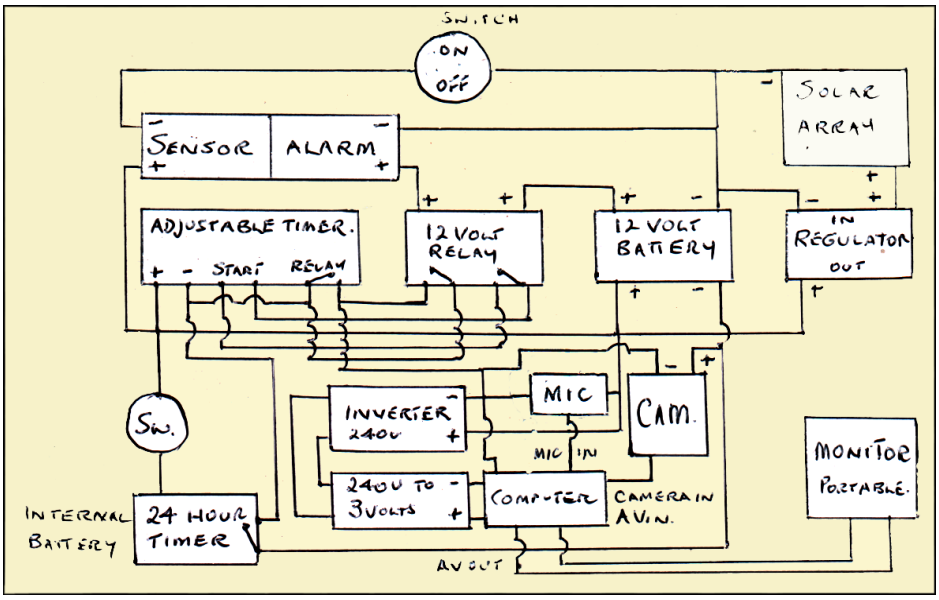

Fig.65 Circuit for third digital camera, from working diary (2010).

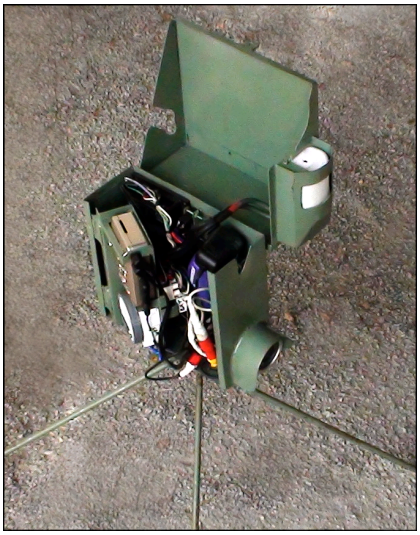

Fig.66 Internal circuitry of third digital camera (2012).

Figures 67-69 show the three digital cameras in position at the Cliffs site. Figure 70, a still from the quoll lair cave, demonstrating the quality of resulting images.

Fig.67 First digital camera at the ‘third cave’, Cliffs site, Photograph J.B. Parish (2012).

Fig.68 Second digital camera at the ‘scat spot’, Cliffs site, Photograph J.B. Parish (2012).

Fig.69 Third camera at the ‘quoll lair’ cave, Cliffs site, Photograph J.B. Parish (2012).

Fig.70 Still from camera situated in the ‘quoll lair’ cave, Cliffs site, showing healthy mature devil at soot sheet (2012).

Appendix 2 Exhibition

Fig. 71 (top) Exhibition venue, University Gallery A, Inveresk, Launceston, 15th May 2012; (lower left -top) *Black,* images fired onto ceramic tiles; (lower left) *White,* each tile 25 x 20cm; (lower right) *Devil*, bronze 25 x 10 x 11.5cm.

Fig. 72 *Creature Art,* 21 pieces A4 size, animal imprints in carbon dust on clear sheets and print paper.

Fig 73. *Maggot Quoll painting* (Left); my drawing *Quoll* (right), one of four 'collaborative' works, including *Devil, Wallaby*, and *Possum Maggot Paintings,* all 90 x 107cm.

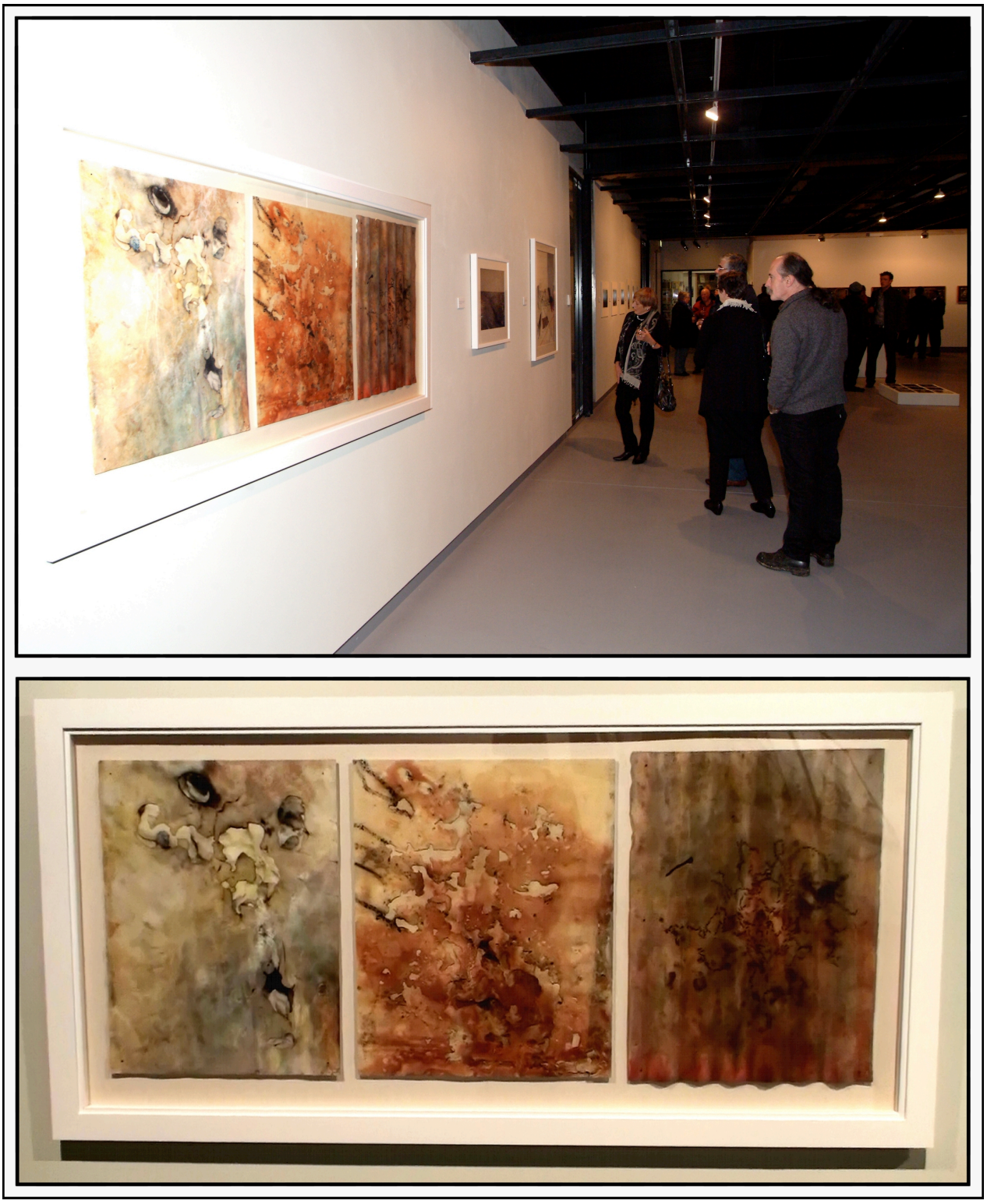

Fig. 74. *Ant, Rat, Human collaborative painting* (top and Lower), 200 x 90cm.

Fig. 75 (top) viewing the Ancient Forest photographs all 67 x 47cm; (lower left), Viewing *The Lovers;* (lower right); *The Lovers,* bronze 45 x 50 x 50cm.

Fig. 76 (top) wire and bronze Thylacine (inset); (lower) *Face to Face* bronze 100 x 45 x 50cm.

Fig. 77 (top) Viewing native Hen sculptures; (below) *Family* bronzes (dimensions variable).

Fig.78 (top) Exhibition guests; (lower) the artist and *Hunters House with Dead Things,* mixed media in wax on canvas 215 x 100cm.